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HALF A HERO *and* FATHER STAFFORD

By ANTHONY HOPE [pseud.]

ILLUSTRATED

Hawkins, Anthony Hope



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HALF A HERO

HALF A HERO

CHAPTER I

THE IMPOSSIBLE—INEVITABLE

In the garden the question was settled without serious difference of opinion. If Sir Robert Perry really could not go on—and Lady Eynesford was by no means prepared to concede even that—then Mr. Puttock, *bourgeois* as he was, or Mr. Coxon, conceited and priggish though he might be, must come in. At any rate, the one indisputable fact was the impossibility of Mr. Medland: this was, to Lady Eynesford's mind, axiomatic, and, in the safe privacy of her family circle (for Miss Scaife counted as one of the family, and Captain Heseltine and Mr. Flemyng did not count at all), she went so far as to declare that, let the Governor do as he would (in the inconceivable case of his being so foolish as to do anything of the kind), she at least would not receive Mr. Medland. Having launched this hypothetical thunderbolt, she asked Alicia Derosne to give her another cup of tea. Alicia poured out the tea, handed it to her sister-in-law, and asked,

"But, Mary, what is there so dreadful about Mr. Medland?"

"Everything," said Lady Eynesford.

"Still," suggested Miss Scaife, "if the creatures are bent on having him——"

"My dear Eleanor, what is a Governor for?" demanded Lady Eynesford.

"To do as he's told and subscribe to the Cup," interposed Dick Derosne. And he added, "They are having a palaver. Old Perry's been in an hour and a half."

Captain Heseltine and Mr. Flemyng looked at their watches and nodded gravely.

"Poor Willie!" murmured Lady Eynesford. "He'll miss his ride."

Poor Willie — that is to say, His Excellency William Derosne, Baron Eynesford, Governor of New Lindsey—deserved all the sympathy his wife's exclamation implied, and even more. For, after a vast amount of fencing and an elaborate disquisition on the state of parties in the colony, Sir Robert Perry decisively refused the dissolution the Governor offered, and ended by saying, with eyebrows raised and the slightest shrug of his shoulders,

"In fact, sir, it's my duty to advise you to send for Mr. Medland."

The Governor pushed his chair back from the table.

"You won't try again?" he asked.

"Impossible, until he has failed."

"You think Puttock out of the question?"

"Quite. He has not following enough: people wouldn't stand Medland being passed over. Really, I don't think you'll find Medland hard to get on with. He's a very able man. For myself, I like him."

The Governor sat silent for a few minutes. Sir Robert, conceiving that his interview was at an end, rose to take leave. Lord Eynesford expressed much regret at being obliged to lose his services:

Sir Robert replied suitably, and was at the door before the Governor reverted to Mr. Medland.

"There are queer stories about him, aren't there?" he asked. "I mean about his private life."

"Well, there is some vague gossip of the kind."

"There now! That's very awkward. He must come here, you know, and what shall I say to my wife?"

"She's been dead three or four years now," said Sir Robert, not referring to the Governor's wife. "And it's only rumour after all. Nothing has ever come to light on the subject."

"But there's a girl."

"There's nothing against the girl — except of course——"

"Oh, just so," said the Governor; "but that makes it awkward. Besides, somebody told me he used to get drunk."

"I think you may disregard that," said Sir Robert. "It only means that he likes his glass of wine as most of us do."

Sir Robert retired, and presently Dick Derosne, who acted as his brother's private secretary, came in. The Governor was in an easy-chair, smoking a cigar.

"So you've settled it," said Dick.

"Yes. Perry won't hear of going on."

"Well, he hardly could after being beaten by seventeen on his biggest bill. What's going to happen?"

Now the Governor thought fit to assume that the course he had, after so much hesitation, determined upon was, to every sensible man, the only possible course. Perhaps he fancied that he would

thus be in a stronger position for justifying it to a sensible woman.

"Of course," he said, in a tone expressive of some surprise at a question so unnecessary, "I am sending for Medland."

Dick Derosne whistled. The Governor relapsed into sincerity.

"No help for it," he pleaded. "You must back me up, old man, with Mary. Women can't understand constitutional obligations."

"She said she wouldn't have him to the house," remarked Dick.

"Oh, Eleanor Scaife must persuade her. I wish you'd go and tell them, Dick. I'm expecting Medland in half-an-hour. I wish I was out of it. I distrust these fellows, both them and their policy."

"And yet you'll have to be civil to them."

"Civil! I must be just as cordial as I was with Perry. That's why it's so important that Mary should be——"

"Reasonable?" suggested Dick.

"Well, yes," said Lord Eynesford.

"How does Perry take it?"

"Oh, I don't think he minds much. He thinks Medland's gang will soon fall to pieces and he'll come back. Besides, the K.C.M.G. softens the blow."

"Ah! It's the cheap defence of nations now—*vice* chivalry, out of fashion," laughed Dick.

Hitherto Lord Eynesford and his wife had enjoyed their reign. Everything had gone well. The Governor agreed heartily with the measures introduced by Sir Robert Perry's Ministry, and his relations with the members of the Government, and especially with its chief, had been based on re-

ciprocal liking and respect: they were most of them gentlemen and all of them respectable men, and, what was hardly less important, their wives and families had afforded no excuse for the exercise of Lady Eynesford's somewhat fastidious nicety as to manners, or her distinctly rigid scrutiny into morals. Under such conditions, the duty and the inclinations of Government House went hand-in-hand. Suddenly, in the midst of an apparently peaceful session, came what the Governor considered an unhallowed combination between a discontented section of Perry's party, and the Opposition under Medland's leadership. The result was the defeat of the Government, the resignation of Sir Robert, and the inevitability of Mr. Medland.

Entering the Legislative Assembly as the representative of an outlying constituency, Medland had speedily made himself the spokesman of the growing Labour Party, and now, after fifteen years of public life, and a secret and subterranean struggle with the old middle-class element, was established as the leader of a united party, so powerful in numbers that the accession of some dozen deserters had placed it in a majority. Mr. Coxon had led the revolt against Sir Robert Perry, and the Governor disliked Coxon even more thoroughly than he distrusted Medland. Miss Scaife said that Medland was the more dangerous, inasmuch as he was sincere and impetuous, while Coxon was neither; but then, the Governor would reply, Coxon was a snob, and Medland, if not exactly a gentleman according to the ideas of Eton and Christchurch—and Lord Eynesford adhered to these ideas—scorned a bad imitation where he could not attain the reality, and by his simplicity and freedom from

pretension extorted the admission of good breeding. But why compare the men? He would have to accept both, for Medland must offer Coxon a place, and beyond doubt the offer would be accepted. The Governor was alarmed for the fate of New Lindsey under such ruling, and awaited with apprehension his next interview with his wife.

Dick Derosne had fulfilled his mission, and his tidings had spread dismay on the lawn. Lady Eynesford reiterated her edict of exclusion against the new Premier; Eleanor Scaife smiled and told her she would be forced to receive him. Alicia in vain sought particulars of Mr. Medland's misdeeds, and the *aides-de-camp* speculated curiously on the composition of the Cabinet, Captain Heseltine betting Mr. Flemyng five to two that it would include Mr. Giles, the leading tailor of Kirton, to whose services the Captain had once been driven to resort with immense trepidation and disastrous results. As a fact, the Captain lost his bet; the Cabinet did not include Mr. Giles, because that gentleman, albeit an able speaker, and a man of much greater intellect than most of his customers, was suspected of paying low wages to his employés, though, according to the Captain, it was impossible that he should pay them as little as their skill deserved.

"I don't think I ever saw Mr. Medland," said Alicia, who had come out from England only a few months before.

"I have seen him," said Eleanor Scaife. "In fact, I had a little talk with him at the Jubilee Banquet."

"Was he sober?" Lady Eynesford, in her bitterness of spirit, allowed herself to ask,

"Mary! Of course he was. He was also rather interesting. He was then in mourning for Mrs. Medland, and he told me he only came because his absence would have been put down to disloyalty."

The mention of Mrs. Medland increased the downward curve of Lady Eynesford's mouth, and she was about to speak, when Dick Derosne exclaimed,

"Well, you can see him now, Al. He's walking up the drive."

The party and their tea-table were screened by trees, and they were able, themselves unseen, to watch Mr. Medland, as, in obedience to the Governor's summons, he walked slowly up to Government House. A girl of about seventeen or eighteen accompanied him to the gate, and left him there with a merry wave of her hand, and he strode on alone, his hands in his trousers pockets and a soft felt hat on the back of his head.

James—or, as his followers called him, "Jimmy" —Medland was forty-one years of age, once an engineer, now a politician, by profession, a tall, loose-limbed, slouching man, with stiff black hair and a shaven face. His features were large and had been clear-cut, but by now they had grown coarser, and his deep-set eyes, under heavy lids and bushy eyebrows, alone survived unimpaired by time and life. Deep lines ran either side from nose to mouth, and the like across his forehead. He had cut himself while shaving that morning, and a large patch of black plaster showed in the centre of his long, prominent chin: as he walked, he now and then lifted a hand to pluck nervously at it; save in this unconscious gesture, he betrayed

no sign of excitement or preoccupation, for, as he walked, he looked about him and once, for a minute, he whistled.

"Awful!" said Lady Eynesford in a whisper.

"He wants a new coat," said Captain Heseltine.

"He looks rather interesting, I think," said Alicia.

At this moment a rare and beautiful butterfly fluttered close over Mr. Medland's head. He paused and watched it for a moment. Then he looked carefully round him: no one was in sight: the butterfly settled for a moment on a flower-bed. Mr. Medland looked round again. Then he cautiously lifted his soft hat from his head, wistfully eyed the butterfly, looked round again, suddenly pounced down on his knees, and pressed the hat to the ground. He was very close to the hidden tea-party now, so close that Alicia's suppressed scream of laughter almost betrayed its presence. Mr. Medland put his head down and, raising one corner of the hat, peered under it. Alicia laughed outright, for the butterfly was fluttering in the air above him. Medland did not hear her; he looked up, saw the butterfly, rose to his feet, put on his hat, and exclaimed, in a voice audible by all the listeners——

"Missed it, by heaven!"

"You see the sort of man he is," observed Lady Eynesford.

"An entomologist, I suppose," suggested Miss Scaife.

"He chases butterflies in the Governor's garden, and swears when he doesn't catch them!"

"He fears not God, neither regards the Governor," remarked Dick, with a solemn shake of his head.

"Don't be flippant, Dick," said Lady Eynesford sharply.

"He might at least brush the knees of his trousers," moaned Captain Heseltine.

Meanwhile Mr. Medland walked up to the door and rang the bell. He was received by Jackson, the butler; and Jackson was flanked by two footmen. Jackson politely concealed his surprise at not seeing a carriage and pair, and stated that his Excellency would receive Mr. Medland at once.

"I hope I haven't kept him waiting," answered Medland. "The pony's lame, and I had to walk."

The footmen, who were young, raw, and English, almost smiled. A Premier dependent on one pony! Jackson redoubled his obsequious attention.

The Governor used to say that he wished his wife had imbibed the constitutional spirit as readily as Jackson.

CHAPTER II

A POPULAR DEMONSTRATION

Miss Eleanor Scaife was *gouvernante des enfants de* New Lindsey; but she found the duty of looking after two small children, shared as it was with a couple of nurses, not enough to occupy her energies. So she organised the hospitality of Government House, and interested herself in the political problems of a young community. In the course of the latter pursuit, a study of Mr. Medland appeared appropriate and needful, and Miss Scaife was minded to engage in it, in spite of the hostility of Lady Eynesford. She had studied Sir Robert Perry for three years, but Sir Robert was disappointing. That he was a charming old gentleman she freely admitted, but he was not in any special way characteristic of a young community. He was just like half-a-hundred members of Parliament whom she had known while she lived with the Eynesfords at home: in fact he was irredeemably European. Accordingly she was glad to see him, but she mentally transferred him to the recreative department, and talked to him about scenery, pictures, and light literature. Lady Eynesford admired Sir Robert because there was no smack of the young community about him; Miss Scaife conceded that point of view, but maintained that there was another: and from that other she ranked Mr. Medland above a thousand Sir Roberts. All this she explained to

Alicia Derosne, after Lady Eynesford had retired in dudgeon, and while the Governor was closeted with the new Premier.

"But," objected Alicia, "Captain Heseltine says——"

"Unless," interrupted Eleanor, "it's something about a coat, I don't care what Captain Heseltine says. He's an authority on that subject, but on no other under the sun."

Alicia abandoned Captain Heseltine's authority and fell back on her sister-in-law's; Eleanor, in spite of the unusual relations of intimate friendship, dating from old school-days, between her employer and herself, could not treat Lady Eynesford's opinion with open disrespect. She drew certain distinctions, which resulted in demonstrating that a close acquaintance between Mr. Medland and Alicia was inadvisable, but that as regards herself the case was different.

"In short," said Alicia, summarising the distinctions, "you are thirty and I am twenty-two. But I don't want to know the man, only I liked him for hunting that butterfly. I wonder what Miss Medland is like. Captain Heseltine says she's very pretty."

"I don't know."

"Is she out? Oh, but does one come out in New Lindsey?"

"It will be much more convenient if she isn't out," said Miss Scaife, rising and beginning to walk toward the house.

Alicia accompanied her. Before they had gone far, Mr. Medland and Dick Derosne appeared in the drive. The interview was ended, and Dick was escorting Mr. Medland.

"I'm afraid we can't avoid them," said Miss Scaife.

"I'm afraid not," said Alicia. "I wonder what they're talking about."

Mr. Medland's voice, though not loud in ordinary speech, was distinct and penetrating. In a moment Alicia's wonder was satisfied.

"Only be sure you get the right gin," he said.

"Good gracious!" said Alicia. "Is that characteristic of a young community, Eleanor?"

Miss Scaife made no reply. The two parties met, and Mr. Medland was presented. At this instant, Alicia, glancing at the house, thought she saw a disapproving face at Lady Eynesford's window; but it seemed hardly likely that the Governor's wife would be watching the Premier out of the window. Alicia wondered whether they had met in the house; Miss Scaife felt no doubt that they had not. She knew that Lady Eynesford's surrender would be a matter of time.

"Well," she said, "are we to congratulate you, Mr. Medland?"

"I believe my tongue is supposed to be sealed for the time," he answered, smiling.

"Mine isn't," laughed Dick, "and I think you may offer him your felicitations."

"You think it, yourself, a subject for congratulation?" asked Eleanor, getting to work at once.

"Oh, Eleanor!" protested Alicia. "Poor Mr. Medland!"

Medland glanced from one to the other, smiling again.

"Whatever may be the sacrifice of personal in-

clination involved," he began solemnly, "when the Governor calls on me I have no——"

"You're making fun of us," said Alicia, seeing the twinkle in his eye.

"I am quoting Mr.—Sir Robert Perry's speech when he last came in."

"Sir Robert is a great friend of mine," declared Alicia.

"Seriously," said Medland, turning to Eleanor, "I am very pleased."

"Why?" she asked. "The responsibility must be frightful."

Alicia and Dick laughed irreverently.

"Eleanor's always talking about responsibility," said the former. "I hate the idea of it, don't you, Mr. Medland?"

"Call it power and try then," he answered.

"Power? Oh, but I have none!"

"No?" he asked, with a look that made Alicia think he might have been "nice" when he was a young man.

"Oh, of course, if it's mere ambition—" began Eleanor impatiently.

"Not altogether," he interposed.

"Then what else?"

"Listen!" he said, holding up his hand.

They were now within twenty or thirty yards of the road, and, listening, they heard the murmur of many voices. Government House stood on the shore of the bay, about half a mile outside the town, and a broad road ran by the gates which, on reaching Kirton, was merged in one of the main thoroughfares, Victoria Street.

Another turn brought the party in the garden in sight of the road. It was thronged with people

for a considerable distance, people in a thick mass, surging up against the gate and hardly held back by a cordon of police.

"Whatever can be the matter?" exclaimed Eleanor.

"I am the matter," said Medland. "They have heard about it."

When the crowd saw him, cheer after cheer rang out, caps and handkerchiefs were waved, and even flags made a sudden appearance. Moving a pace in advance of his companions, he lifted his hat, and the enthusiastic cries burst forth with renewed vigour. He signed to them to be still, but they did not heed him. Alicia caught hold of Eleanor's hand, her breath coming and going in sudden gasps. Eleanor looked at Medland. He was moistening his lips, and she saw a little quiver run through his limbs.

"By Jove!" said Dick Derosne.

Medland turned to Eleanor, and pointed to the crowd.

"Yes, I see," she said.

He held out his hand to bid them farewell, and walked on toward the gate. They stood and watched his progress. Suddenly a different cry rose.

"Let her pass! Let her pass! Let her through to him!"

The crowd slowly parted, and down the middle of the road, amid the raising of hats and pretty rough compliments, a young girl came walking swiftly and proudly, with a smile on her lips.

"It's his daughter," whispered Alicia. "Oh!"

Medland opened the gate and went out. The girl, her fair hair blowing out behind her and her

cheeks glowing red, ran to meet him, and, as he stooped and kissed her, the crowd, having, as a crowd, but one way to tell its feelings, roared and cheered again. Medland, with one hand on his daughter's shoulder and the other holding his hat, walked down the lane between human walls, and was lost to sight as the walls found motion and closed in behind him.

After some moments' silence Dick Derosne recovered himself, and remarked with a cynical air,

"Neat bit of acting—kissing the girl and all that."

But Alicia would not have it. With a tremulous laugh, she said,

"I should like to have kissed him too. Oh, Eleanor, I didn't know it was like that!"

Perhaps Eleanor did not either, but she would not admit it. What was it but a lot of ignorant people cheering they knew not what? If anything, it was degrading. Yet, in spite of these most reasonable reflections, she knew that her cheeks had flushed and her heart beat at the sight and the sound.

They were still standing and watching the crowd as it retreated toward Kirton, when the Governor, who had come out to get some fresh air after his arduous labour, joined them.

"Extraordinary the popularity of the man in Kirton," he observed, in answer to Alicia's eager description of Mr. Medland's triumph.

"What has he done for them?" asked Eleanor.

"Done? Oh, I don't know. He's done something, I suppose; but it's what he's going to do that they're so keen about."

"Is he a Socialist?" inquired Alicia.

"I can't tell you," replied Lord Eynesford. "I don't know what he is—and I'm not sure I know what a Socialist is. Ask Eleanor."

"A Socialist," began Eleanor, in an authoritative tone, "is——"

But this much-desired definition was unhappily lost, for a footman came up and told Lord Eynesford that his wife would like to see him if he were disengaged.

The Governor smiled grimly, winked imperceptibly, and departed.

"It's been quite an entertaining day," said Miss Scaife. "But I'm very sorry for Sir Robert."

"What was Mr. Medland talking to you about, Dick?" asked Alicia.

"Oh, a new sort of drink. You take a long glass, and some pounded ice and some gin—only you must be careful to get——"

"I don't want to hear about it."

"Well, you asked, you know," retorted Dick, with the air of a man who suffers under the perpetual illogicality of woman.

CHAPTER III

HOSPITALITY EX OFFICIO

"I CONFESS to being very much alarmed," said Mr. Kilshaw, "and I think Capital generally shares the feeling."

"If I thought he could last, I should share it myself," said Sir Robert Perry.

"He may easily last long enough to half ruin my business. Large concerns are delicate concerns."

"Come, Kilshaw, Puttock's a capitalist; he'll see Capital isn't wronged."

"Puttock is all very well in his way; but what do you say to Jewell and Norburn?"

"Jewell's an old-style Radical: he won't do you much harm. You hit the nail on the head when you mention Norburn. Norburn would be very pleased to run your factory as a State work-shop for two pound a week."

"And pickings," added Mr. Kilshaw, with scornful emphasis.

A third gentleman, who was sitting near in the large bow-window of the Central Club, an elderly man, with short-clipped white hair and a pleasant face, joined in the talk.

"Norburn? Why, is that the fellow I tried? Is he in Medland's Government?"

"That's the man, Sir John," answered Kilshaw; and Sir Robert added,

"You gave him three months for inciting to riot in the strike at the Collieries two years ago. He's made Minister of Public Works; I hear the Gov-

ernor held out for a long while, but Medland insisted."

"And my works are to be Public Works, I suppose," grumbled Kilshaw, finding some comfort in this epigrammatic statement of the unwelcome prospect before him.

"Red-hot, isn't he?" asked Sir John Oakapple, who, as Chief Justice of the colony, had sent the new Minister to gaol.

Kilshaw nodded.

"Will he and Puttock pull together?" continued the Chief Justice.

"The hopeful part of the situation is," said Sir Robert, "that Puttock is almost bound to fall out with somebody, either with Norburn, for the reason you name, or with Coxon, because Coxon will try to rule the roast, or with Medland himself."

"Why should he quarrel with Medland?"

"Why does the heir quarrel with the king? Besides, there's the Prohibition Question. I doubt if Medland will satisfy Puttock and his people over that."

"Oh, I expect he will," said the Chief Justice. "I asked him once—this is in confidence, you know—if he didn't think it a monstrous proposal, and he only shrugged those slouched shoulders of his, and said, 'We've got Sunday Closing, and we go in the back way: if we have Prohibition the drink'll go in the back way—same principle, my dear Chief Justice'": and that High Officer finished his anecdote with a laugh.

"The odd thing about Medland is," remarked Sir Robert, "that he's utterly indifferent about everything except what he's utterly mad about. He has no moderate sympathies or antipathies."

"Therefore he's a most dangerous man," said Kilshaw.

"Oh, I think he sympathises, in moderation, with morality," laughed Sir John.

"Ay," rejoined Perry quickly, "and that's all. What if Puttock raised the Righteous on him?"

"Oh, then I should stand by Medland," said the Chief Justice decisively. "And young Coxon's to be Attorney-General. He's safe enough."

"A man who thinks only about himself is generally safe," remarked Sir Robert dryly; and he added, with a smile, "That's why lawyers are such a valuable class."

The Chief Justice laughed, and took his revenge by asking,

"How many windows did they break, Perry?"

"Only three," rejoined the Ex-Premier. "Considering the popular enthusiasm I got off cheap."

"You can't stir a people's heart for nothing. All the same, the reception they gave him was a fine sight."

"Extraordinary, wasn't it?"

"I call it most ominous," said Mr. Kilshaw, and he rose and went out gloomily.

"I haven't had my invitation to meet them at Government House yet," said the Chief Justice.

He referred to the banquet which the Governor was accustomed to give to a new Ministry, when the leading officials of the colony were always included in the party.

Sir Robert looked round for possible eavesdroppers.

"There's a hitch," he said in a low voice. "Lady Eynesford makes difficulties about having Medland."

"Oh, that's nonsense!"

"Utter nonsense; but it seems she does. However, I suppose you'll get your card in a day or two."

"And renew my acquaintance with Mr. Norburn under happier circumstances."

"Norburn will feel as one used to when one breakfasted with the school-master—as a peace-making after another sort of interview."

Sir Robert Perry proved right in supposing that Lady Eynesford's resistance could not last for ever. It was long enough and fierce enough to make the Governor very unhappy and the rest of the family very uncomfortable, but it was foredoomed to failure. Even the Bishop of Kirton, whom she consulted, told her that high place had its peculiar duties, and that however deplorable the elevation of such a man might be, if the Queen's representative invited him to join his counsels, the Queen's representative's wife must invite him to join her dinner-party: and the Bishop proved the sincerity of his constitutional doctrine by accepting an invitation to meet the new Ministry. Lady Eynesford, abandoned by Church and State alike, surrendered, thanking heaven that Daisy Medland's youth postponed another distasteful necessity.

"You'll have to face it in a few months' time," said Eleanor Scaife, who was not always as comforting a companion as a lady in her position is supposed to be.

"Oh, they'll be out in a month," answered Lady Eynesford confidently. "The Bishop says they can't last. Do you know, Eleanor, Mr. Coxon is the only Churchman among them?"

"Shocking!" said Eleanor, with no more sus-

picion of irony than her reputation as an *esprit fort* demanded. It really startled her a little: the social significance seemed considerable.

Mr. Medland's invitation to dinner caused him perhaps more perturbation than had his invitation to power. A natural sensitiveness of mind supplied in him the place of an experience of refined society or an impulse of inherited pride. He cared nothing that his advent to office alarmed and displeased many; but it gave him pain to be compelled to dine at the table of a lady who, by notorious report, did not desire his company.

"I don't want to go, and she doesn't want to have me," he protested to his daughter; "yet she must have me and I must go. The great god Sham again, Daisy."

"You'll meet him everywhere now," said Daisy, with a melancholy shake of her young head.

"And rout him somewhere?"

"Oh yes, everywhere—except at Government House."

"I hate going."

"I believe mother would have liked it. Don't you think so, dear?"

"Perhaps. Should you?"

"I should be terribly afraid of Lady Eynesford."

"Just my feeling," said Medland, stroking his chin.

When he entered the drawing-room at Government House, and was presented to his hostess by the Governor, on whose brow rested a little pucker of anxiety, Lady Eynesford was talking to the Bishop and to Mr. Puttock. Puttock had accepted the office of Minister of Trade and Customs, but not without grumbling, for he had aspired to con-

trol the finances of the colony as Treasurer, and considered that Medland underrated his influence as a political leader. He was a short man, rather stout, with large whiskers; he wore a blue ribbon in the button-hole of his dress-coat. Lady Eynesford considered him remarkably like a grocer, and the very quintessence of nonconformity; but he at least was indisputably respectable, a devoted husband, and the father of a large family, behind whose ranks he was in the habit of walking to chapel twice every Sunday. Sometimes he preached when he got there. Just to his right, talking briskly to Alicia Derosne, stood Mr. Coxon, the Attorney-General, very smart in English-made clothes, and discussing the doings of people at home whom he had known or seen in the days when he was at Cambridge, and had the run of a rich uncle's house in Park Lane. In the distance the Roman Catholic Archbishop was talking to Eleanor Scaife, and suffering Sir John Oakapple's jests with a polite faint smile. This mixture of the sects ranked high among the trials of Lady Eynesford's position, and contained precious opportunities for Miss Scaife's inquiring mind.

It seems true beyond question that moral estimation counts for more in the likings of women than in those of men. Medland, in spite of the utter insignificance, as he conceived, of the lady's judgment considered as an intellectual process, was too much of a politician, and perhaps a little too much of a man also, not to wish to conciliate the Governor's wife; but his courteous deference, his clever talk, and his search for points of sympathy broke ineffectually on the barriers of Lady Eynesford's official politeness and personal reserve. She was

cruel in her clear indication of the footing upon which they met, and the Governor's uneasy glance of appeal would produce nothing better than a cold interest in the scenery of the Premier's constituency. Medland was glad when Lady Eynesford turned to the Chief Justice and released him; his relief was so great that it was hardly marred by finding Mrs. Puttock on his other side. Yet Mrs. Puttock and he were not congenial spirits.

"We are sending a deputation to you," said Mrs. Puttock, directly Medland's change of position gave her an opportunity.

He emptied his glass of champagne, and asked,

"Which of your many 'We's,' Mrs. Puttock?"

"Why, the W.T.A.A."

"I won't affect ignorance—Women's—Total—Abstinence—Association."

"The enthusiasm this afternoon was enormous. Of course Mr. Puttock could not be there; but I told them I felt sure that with the new Ministry an era of real hope had dawned," and Mrs. Puttock looked inquiringly at the Premier, who was in his turn looking at the foaming wine that fell into his glass from Jackson's practised hand.

"A new era?" he answered. "Oh, well, you didn't get much out of Perry. What do you want of me?"

"We want to strengthen your hands in dealing drastically with the problem. Of course, it will be one of your first measures."

"We have at least six first measures already on the list," remarked the Premier, smiling.

"I saw your daughter to-day," Mrs. Puttock continued. "I went to ask her to join us."

"Isn't she rather young to join things?" pleaded

Mr. Medland. "Poor child! She would hardly understand what she's giving—I mean, what she's going in for. What did she say?"

"Well, really, Mr. Medland, I think you might speak a word to her. She told me she loved champagne and tipsy-cake. The tipsy-cake doesn't matter, because it can be made without alcohol.—I beg your pardon?"

"I didn't speak," said the Premier.

"But champagne! At her age!"

"She's only tasted it half-a-dozen times."

"Well, I hope every one will have to give it up soon. My husband says that the Cabinet——"

"Here's treason! Has he been telling you our secrets?"

"Secrets! Why, two-thirds of the party are pledged——"

But here Lady Eynesford again claimed the Premier's attention, and he was really glad of it.

Dick Derosne walked home with Mr. Medland. He had intended to go only to the gate, but Medland pressed him to go further, and, engrossed in conversation, they reached Medland's house without separating.

"Come in and see Daisy," said Medland. "She's been alone all the evening, poor girl, and will be glad of better company than mine."

"Oh, come, I expect she likes your society better than any one else's."

"Well, that won't last long, will it?"

They went in and found Daisy supping on the wing of a chicken, and some wine-and-water. Medland led the way, and, as soon as his daughter saw him, she exclaimed,

"Was it very awful, father?"

"Well, was it, Mr. Derosne?" he asked of Dick. "Daisy, this is the Governor's brother, Mr. Derosne."

"It was awful!" said Dick, executing his bow. "Those great feeds always are."

"Why, Daisy," exclaimed Mr. Medland, "you're drinking wine. How about Mrs. Puttock?"

"Oh, she told you? She said it was very wicked."

"And you?"

"Oh, I said it wasn't, because you did it."

"Luckily, a conclusion may be right, though the reason for it is utterly wrong," said the Premier.

"I," said Dick, "always admit things are wicked, you know, and say I do 'em all the same. It saves a lot of argument."

The door opened and Mr. Norburn walked in.

"Is it too late for me to come?" he asked.

"Of course not," said Daisy, greeting him with evident pleasure, and ensconcing him in an armchair. "We expect you to come at all the odd times. That's the part of an intimate friend, isn't it, Mr. Derosne?"

Medland was speaking to Norburn, and Dick took the opportunity of remarking,

"Mayn't I come at an odd time now and then?"

"Oh, do. We shall be so pleased."

"Mr. Norburn doesn't come at all of them, does he?"

"At most. Do you mind that?"

"Of course I do. Who wouldn't?"

"I don't."

"No, if you did I shouldn't."

Dick was, it must be admitted, getting along very well, considering that he had only been presented to the young lady ten minutes before. That

was Dick's way; and when the young lady is attractive, it is a way that has many recommendations, only sometimes it leads to a pitfall—a cold answer, or a snub.

"But why," asked Daisy, in apparent surprise, "should you mind about what I thought? I'm afraid I should never think about whether you liked it or not, you know."

"Good-night," said Dick. And when he got outside and was lighting his cigar, he exclaimed, "Confound the girl!" And after a pause he added, "Hang the fellow!" and shook his head and went home.

CHAPTER IV

WEEDING OUT THE WEAK-KNEED

In a short time it happened that Lady Eynesford conceived a high opinion of Mr. Coxon. He was, she declared, the one bright spot in the new Ministry; he possessed ability, principle, sound Churchmanship, and gentlemanly demeanour. A young man thus equipped could hardly fail of success, and Lady Eynesford, in spite of the Governor's decidedly lukewarm approbation, was pleased to take the Attorney-General under her special protection. More than once in the next week or two did Mr. Coxon, tall-hatted, frock-coated, and new-gloved, in obedience to cordial invitations, take tea in the veranda of Government House. He was naturally gratified by these attentions, and, being not devoid of ambition, soon began to look upon his position as the starting-point for a greater prize. Lady Eynesford was, here again, with him—up to a point. She thought (and thoughts are apt to put themselves with a bluntness which would be inexcusable in speech) that it was high time that Eleanor Scaife was married, and, from an abstract point of view, this could hardly be denied. Lady Eynesford took the next step. Eleanor and Coxon would suit one another to perfection. Hence the invitations to tea, and Lady Eynesford's considerate withdrawals into the house, or out of sight in the garden. Of course it was impossible to gauge Eleanor's views at this early stage, but Lady Eynesford was assured of Mr. Coxon's gratitude—

his bearing left no doubt of it—and she congratulated herself warmly on the promising and benevolent scheme which she had set afoot.

Now the danger of encouraging ambitious young men—and this remark is general in its scope, and not confined at all to one subject-matter—is that their vaulting imaginations constantly overleap the benevolence of their patrons. Mr. Coxon would not have been very grateful for permission to make love to Miss Scaife; he was extremely grateful for the opportunity of recommending himself to Alicia Derosne. The Governor's sister—none less—became by degrees his aim and object, and when Lady Eynesford left him with Miss Scaife, hoping that Alicia would have the sense not to get in the way, Mr. Coxon's soaring mind regarded himself as left with Alicia, and he hoped that the necessary exercise of discretion would be forthcoming from Miss Scaife. Presently this little comedy revealed itself to Eleanor, and, after an amused glance at the retreating figure of her misguided friend, she would bury herself in *Tomes on the British Colonies*, and abandon Alicia to the visitor's wiles. A little indignant at the idea of being "married off" in this fashion, she did not feel it incumbent on her to open Lady Eynesford's eyes. As for Alicia—Alicia laughed, and thought that young men were much the same all the world over.

"Tomes," said Eleanor on one occasion, looking up from the first volume of that author—and perhaps she chose her passage with malice—"clearly intimates his opinion that the Empire can't hold together unless the social bonds between England and the colonies are strengthened."

"Does he, dear?" said Alicia, playing with the

pug. "Do look at his tongue, Mr. Coxon. Isn't it charming?"

"Yes. Listen to this: 'It is on every ground to be regretted that the divorce between society at home and in the colonies is so complete. The ties of common interest and personal friendship which, impalpable though they be, bind nations together more closely than constitutions and laws, are to a great extent wanting. Even the interchange of visits is rare; closer connection by inter-marriage, in a broad view, non-existent.'"

"There's a great deal of sense in that," said Coxon.

"Well, Mr. Coxon," laughed Alicia, "you should have thought of it when you were in England."

Eleanor's eyes had dropped again to Tomes, and Mr. Coxon answered, in a tone not calculated to disturb the reader,

"I hope it's not altogether too late."

"The choice is so small out here, isn't it? Now, according to Tomes, Mr. Medland ought to marry a duchess—well, a dowager-duchess—but there isn't one."

"I should hardly have thought the Premier quite the man for a duchess," said Coxon, rather superciliously.

"Well, I like him much better than most dukes I've seen. Why do you shake your head?"

"I've the greatest respect for Mr. Medland as my leader, but—come, Miss Derosne, he's hardly—now is he?"

"I like him very much indeed," declared Alicia. "I think he's the most interesting man I've ever met."

"But thinking a man interesting and thinking him a man one would like to marry are quite different, surely?" suggested fastidious Mr. Coxon.

"Thinking him interesting and thinking him a man one would be *likely* to marry are quite different," corrected Eleanor, emerging from Tomes.

"By the way, who was Mrs. Medland?" asked Alicia.

Coxon hesitated for a moment: Eleanor raised her eyes.

"I believe her name was Benyon," he answered. "I—I know nothing about her."

"Didn't you know her?"

"No, I was in England, and she died a year after I came back—before I went into politics at all."

"I wonder if she was nice."

"My dear Alicia, what can it matter?" asked Eleanor.

"If you come to that, Eleanor, most of the things we talk about don't matter," protested Alicia. "We are not Attorney-Generals, like Mr. Coxon, whose words are worth—how much?"

"Now, Miss Derosne, you're chaffing me."

"Come and feed the swans," said Alicia, rising.

"What will Mary think?" said Eleanor, settling herself down again to Tomes. "And why is Alicia so curious about the Medlands?"

It was perhaps natural that Eleanor should be puzzled to answer the question she put to herself, but in reality the interest Alicia felt admitted of easy explanation. She had first encountered Medland under conditions which invested him with all the attraction that a visibly dominant character exercises over a young mind, and the impression

then created had been of late much deepened by what she heard from her brother. Dick felt that the Governor would be a cold, and Lady Eynesford a thoroughly unfavourable, auditor of his views on the Medlands, but, in spite of Daisy's cruel indifference, he had taken advantage of her permission to pay her more than one visit, and he poured out his soul to his sister. His outpourings consisted of enthusiastic praises of both father and daughter.

"By Jove!" he said, "it's simply—you know, Al—simply fetching to see them together. He's a splendid chap—not an ounce of side or nonsense about him. And she's awfully pretty. Don't you think she's awfully pretty, Al?"

"I only saw her for a moment, dear."

"It's too bad of Mary to go on as she does. She simply ignores Miss Medland."

"Miss Medland's still very young, Dick. Is he —how does he treat her?"

"I don't know. It's almost funny—they're always jumping up to get one another things, don't you know!" answered Dick, whose feelings outran his powers of elegant description.

"Do you go there much, Dick?"

"Now, Al, don't try to do Mary to me."

Alicia laughed.

"I think Mary will 'do' as much 'Mary' to you as you want, if you don't take care, you foolish boy. But, Dick, tell me. How do Willie and Mr. Medland get on?"

"Oh, pretty well, but— You won't tell?"

Alicia promised secrecy, and Dick, conscious of criminality, lowered his voice and continued,

"I believe there's a row on in the Cabinet already. Willie said Puttock and Jewell were at

loggerheads with Norburn, and Medland was inclined to back Norburn."

"And Mr. Coxon?"

"He's supposed to be lying low. And then I was down at the Club and met old Oakapple there, and he told me that Kilshaw had boasted of having done a deal with Puttock."

"What did he mean?"

"Why, that he and his gang—the rich capitalists, you know—were to back up old Puttock's temperance measures, provided Puttock (and Jewell, if Puttock could nobble him) prevented Medland from bringing in—what the deuce was it?—some Socialistic labour legislation or other—I forget what. Anyhow the Chief Justice thought Perry would be back soon."

"What? That Mr. Medland would be turned out? What a shame! He hasn't had a fair chance, has he?"

The gossip which Dick had picked up was not very wide of the mark. It was perhaps too early to talk of absolute dissensions, but it was tolerably well known that a struggle was likely to occur in the Cabinet, nominally on the question of the relative priority to be given to different measures, more truly perhaps on the issue whether the advanced labour party, represented by Norburn, or the Radicals of the older type, headed by Puttock and Jewell, were to control the policy of the Premier and the Government. The latter section was inextricably connected, and, in its *personnel*, almost identical with the party who set the Prohibition question above and before all other matters. The concrete form taken by this conflict of abstract principles seemed likely to be—should the

Government begin with a Temperance measure, or should it, in the first place, proceed to give to Labour that drastic Factory and Workshop Act which Norburn had advocated and Medland accepted, and which would, Mr. Kilshaw declared, reduce every manufacturer to the position of a slave of Government and a pauper to boot, would drive capital from the colony, and shut up every mill in New Lindsey? Now Mr. Kilshaw would, if he were reduced to choose, rather close the public-houses than the mills. So he told Sir Robert Perry, who was very quiet, but very watchful just now; and the story was that Sir Robert said, "Puttock has got shares in the Southern Sea Mill—and Puttock's a Prohibition man," and refused to say any more; but that was enough —so the talk ran—to send Mr. Kilshaw straight to Puttock's hall-door.

These public matters gave Mr. Coxon much food for thought. His own attitude was, at present, considered to be one of neutrality toward the rival factions in the Government. He was in the habit of defining his aim in political life as being a steady and gradual removal of obstacles to the progress of the colony; to attain complete truth, it was only necessary to alter the definition by substituting "Mr. Coxon" for "the colony"; and the question which now occupied him was how he might best secure the best possible position for himself, without, as he hastened to protest, abandoning his principles. He disliked Puttock, and he was envious of Norburn, who threatened to supplant him as the "rising man" of his party. Should he help Puttock to remove Norburn, or lend Norburn a hand in ousting Puttock?

Down to the very week before the Legislative Assembly met, Mr. Medland kept his own counsel, disclosing his mind not even to his colleagues. Then he called a Cabinet, and listened to the conflicting views set forth by Puttock and Norburn.

"And what do you say, Mr. Coxon?" he asked, when Puttock's vehement harangue came to an end.

"I shall follow your judgment implicitly," replied Mr. Coxon, with touching fidelity.

"I feel bound to state," said Mr. Puttock, "and I believe I speak for my friend Jewell also" (Mr. Jewell nodded), "that with us priority for Temperance legislation and a cautious policy in imposing hampering restrictions on commercial undertakings are of vital moment. We cannot agree to give way on either point."

"And you, Norburn?" asked Medland, turning to his devoted follower, and smiling a kindly smile.

Norburn was about to speak, when Puttock broke in,

"It is best that the Premier should understand our position; what we have stated is absolutely essential to our continuance in the Government."

Mr. Medland thought that the function of a follower was to follow, and of a leader to lead. He always found it difficult to put up with opposition, and patience was not among whatever qualities of statesmanship he possessed.

Drumming gently on the table, he said,

"Oh, no Temperance this session. We'll give 'em a Labour session." He paused, and added, "And give it 'em hot and strong."

So that evening Puttock and Jewell resigned, and the Cabinet, meeting the House shorn and

maimed, was established in power by the magnificent majority of ten.

> "If so soon as this I'm done for,
> I wonder what I was begun for!"

quoted Sir John Oakapple. "If they never agreed at all, what did they take office together for?"

"The screw," suggested Captain Heseltine.

"Then why haven't they stuck to it?"

Silence met this question, and the Chief Justice turned a look of bland inquiry on Mr. Kilshaw.

Mr. Kilshaw coughed and turned the pages of the *Kirton World.*

The Chief Justice winked at Dick Derosne, and said that it was refreshing to see there were still men who would sacrifice office to conviction.

"Oh, uncommon, Sir John," said Dick Derosne, and these cynics, having done entire injustice to two deeply sincere men, went off and joined in a game of pool. The Chief Justice took the pool.

CHAPTER V

A TALK AT A DANCE

IMMEDIATELY after the Assembly had so narrowly confirmed Mr. Medland's position, it adjourned for a fortnight in order to allow time for the reorganisation of the Government, and the preparation of its legislative projects. The Governor seized the opportunity and started on a shooting expedition, accompanied by his wife. His absence somewhat diminished the *éclat* of Sir John Oakapple's dance, but nevertheless it was agreed to be a very brilliant affair. Everybody came, for Sir John's position invited hospitality to all parties alike, and the host, as became a well-to-do bachelor, provided a sumptuous entertainment. Even Mr. Medland was there, for it was his daughter's first public appearance, and he and Sir Robert Perry had interchanged some friendly remarks on the existing crisis.

"I suppose I mustn't ask who you're going to give us instead of your deserters," said Sir Robert jokingly.

"Oh," answered Medland, "I'm going to fill up with Labour men. I haven't quite fixed on the men yet."

"Then you'll be all one colour—all red? But I must congratulate you on your daughter's *début*. She and Miss Derosne are the *belles* of the evening."

Then Sir Robert, in his pretty way, must needs be led up to Daisy Medland and dance a quadrille with her, apologising politely to Dick Derosne,

who had arranged to sit out the said quadrille with the same lady, and became a violent anti-Perryite on the spot.

Alicia passed on Mr. Coxon's arm, and stopped for a moment to condole.

"I didn't know Premiers danced," she said, and perhaps her glance conveyed a shy invitation to Medland.

"If I ask you now, I shall have another secession," he replied, smiling at Coxon. "Besides, I can't dance."

"You must sit out with me then," she said, growing bolder. "You don't mind, do you, Mr. Coxon?"

Coxon and Dick were left to console one another, and Alicia sat down with Medland. At first he was silent, watching his daughter. When the quadrille ended, he rose and said,

"Come into the garden."

"But my partner for the next won't be able to find me."

"Well, supposing he can't?" said the Premier.

"It makes one very conceited to be a Premier," thought Alicia, but she went into the garden.

Then began what she declared to herself was the most interesting conversation to which she had ever listened. From silence, the Premier passed to a remark here and there, thence to a conversation, thence, as the evening went on and they strolled further and further away from the house, into a monologue on his life and aims and hopes. Young man after young man sought her in vain, or, finding the pair, feared to intrude and retired in discontent, while Medland strove to draw the picture of that far-off society whose bringing-near was his goal in

public life. She wondered if he talked to other women like that: and she found herself hoping that he did not. His gaunt form seemed to fill and his sunk eyes to spring out to meet the light, as he painted for her the time when his dreams should have clothed themselves with the reality which his persuasive imagination almost gave them now.

Then he suddenly turned on himself.

"And I might have done something," he said; "but I've wasted most of my life."

"Wasted it?" she echoed in a wondering question.

"I don't know why I talk about it to-night, still less why I talk about it to you. I talked about it last to—to my wife."

"Ah! But your daughter?"

"Daisy!" he laughed tenderly. "Poor little Daisy! I don't bother her with it all." Then he added, "Really I've no business to bother you either, Miss Derosne. I break out sometimes. I'm afraid I'm not 'a silent, strong man.' Does it bore you?"

"You know—you know—" Alicia stammered.

"And now," he said, rising in his excitement, "even now, what have I? The place—the form—the name of power; and these creatures hold me back and hang on my flank and—I can do nothing." He sank back on the bench where she sat.

Alicia put her hand out and drew it back. Then she stretched it out again, and laid it on his arm.

"I am so sorry," she said, and her voice faltered. "Oh, if I could—but how absurd!"

Medland turned suddenly and looked her in the face.

"You will help some one," he answered, "some better man. And I—I beg your pardon. Come."

Alicia asked herself afterward if she ought to be ashamed of what she did then. She caught the Premier by the arm, and said,

"But I want to stay with you." And then she sat trembling to hear his answer.

For a moment he did not answer. He passed his hand over his brow; then he smiled sadly.

"Nearly twenty years ago a woman said that to me," he said. "But she—well, it wasn't to talk politics."

"Oh, to call it *talking politics!*" she answered, with a little gasping laugh.

With another swift turn of his head, he bent his eyes on hers. She turned her head away, and neither spoke. Alicia played nervously with one glove which she had stripped off, while Medland gravely watched her face, beautiful in its pure outline and quivering with unwonted emotions. With a start he roused himself.

"Come," he said imperiously, offering his arm. She took it, and, without more words, they turned toward the house.

They had not gone far, when Eleanor Scaife met them. She was walking quickly, looking round as she went, as though in search. When she saw them she started, and cried,

"Oh, I want you, Alicia."

Medland immediately drew aside, and with a bow took his way. Alicia, calming herself with an effort, asked what was the matter.

"Why, it's that wretched brother of yours. I really do not know what Mary will say. I shall be afraid——"

"But what has Dick done?"

"Done? Why he's danced six dances out of eight with that Medland child. The whole room's talking about them."

"Eight dances? There can't have been eight dances?"

"Don't be silly," said Eleanor sharply. "I suppose you danced? No! I remember I didn't see you. Where have *you* been?"

"I—I've been sitting out."

"Not—not—Alicia, with one man? Worse and——"

"Yes."

"Mr. Coxon, then, I hope? At least he's safe a"

"No."

"Who then?"

"I don't know why you should ask——"

"Alicia! Was it—?" exclaimed Eleanor, with a gesture toward where she had found her friend.

"Mr. Medland? Yes," answered Alicia. And, in her effort to exclude timidity, she infused into her voice a note of defiance.

Eleanor sat down on the nearest seat. Surprise dominated her faculties. Dick's behaviour was reprehensible, but, given such creatures as young men, natural. But Alicia? The thing was too surprising to cause uneasiness.

"Well, you are a queer child! Here's all the room looking for you to dance with you, and you go and sit in the garden with a politician of five-and-forty! What in the world were you doing?"

"Talking politics," said Alicia, now quite calmly.

"And you've been here since——?"

"The first quadrille."

"Six mortal dances!" said Eleanor, in an envious

tone. Alicia had had a grand opportunity. "Did you remember to ask him about that description of the Cabinet meetings in Tomes? You remember we agreed to?"

"I'm afraid I forgot, dear."

"Oh, how stupid of you! If I'd been—but good gracious! I forgot Dick. Do come, Alicia, and get him away from her. We seem to have nothing but Medlands to-night!"

The first person they met inside the ball-room was Mr. Coxon. He was enveloped in gloom. Alicia's conscience smote her.

"Oh!" she cried, "I forgot Mr. Coxon! I must go and scold him for not coming for me. Nonsense, Eleanor! I can't help about Dick," and, shaking off Miss Scaife's detaining hand, she went to play the usual imposture.

Eleanor looked round in bewilderment. Seeing Lady Perry, she was struck with an idea, crossed the room, and joined the ex-Premier's smiling, pleasant wife. Lady Perry had noticed enough to be *au fait* with the situation at a word. She rose and went to where Medland was now leaning listlessly against the wall. She spoke a word to him; he started, smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I know you'll forgive me. One can't be too careful," she urged. "No one can be father and mother both."

Mr. Medland beckoned to his daughter; she came to him, Dick standing a few feet off.

"Whenever, Daisy," said Medland, "a thing is pleasant, one must not, in this world, have much of it. Is that the gospel, Lady Perry?"

"You'll make young Mr. Derosne too conceited, my dear," whispered Lady Perry, very kindly; but

she favoured Dick, who knew well that he was a sinner, with a severe glance.

Thus Eleanor Scaife, having rid her party of the Medlands—for the moment, as she impatiently added—was at liberty to listen to the conversation of Mrs. Puttock. Mrs. Puttock was always most civil to any of the Government House party, and she entertained Eleanor, who resolutely refused all invitations to dance, with plenty of gossip. Amidst their talk and the occasional interruptions of men who joined and left them, the evening wore away, and Eleanor had just signed to Alicia to make ready to go, when Mrs. Puttock touched on the Premier, who was visible across the room, chatting merrily with his host, and laughing heartily at the Chief Justice's stories.

"The Premier seems in good spirits," said Mrs. Puttock, a little acidly.

"Oh, I expect he's only bearing up in public," laughed Eleanor. "But there certainly is a great change in him since I first recollect him."

"Indeed, Miss Scaife."

"Yes," said Eleanor, rising, for she saw Alicia approaching under Captain Heseltine's escort. "It was about the Jubilee time. He seemed then quite overcome with grief at the loss of his wife. Ah, here's Alicia!"

"Wife!" exclaimed Mrs. Puttock, bestowing on Eleanor a look of deep significance. "It's my belief he never had a wife."

Eleanor started.

"What do you mean?" she began, but she checked herself when she found that Alicia was close beside her. She hastily bade Mrs. Puttock good-night.

"I mean what I say," observed that lady, with an emphatic nod. Eleanor escaped in bewilderment.

"Who never had a wife?" asked Alicia, with a laugh, as they were putting on their cloaks.

After a moment's pause, Eleanor answered,

"Sir John Oakapple," and she excused this deviation from truth by the sage reflection that girls like Alicia must not be told everything.

"We all know that," commented Alicia, contemptuously. "I hoped it was something interesting."

Eleanor enjoyed a smile in the sheltering gloom of the carriage. She felt very discreet.

CHAPTER VI

A CANDIDATE FOR OFFICE

THE Premier sent his daughter home alone in a fly and walked with Coxon, whose road lay the same way. As they went, they talked of plans and prospects, and Medland unconsciously exasperated his companion by praising Norburn's character and capacity.

"Depend upon it, he's the coming man of New Lindsey," he said. "He thinks the world will get better sooner than it will, you may say. Well, perhaps I share that illusion. Anyhow he has enthusiasm and grit, and I love his utter disinterestedness."

Coxon acquiesced coldly in his rival's praises.

"That," continued Medland, "is where we have the pull. Who is there to follow Perry? Now Norburn is ready to step into my shoes the moment I'm gone, or—or come to grief."

They had reached Digby Square, a large open place, laid out with walks and trees, and named after Sir Jabez Digby, K.B., first Governor of New Lindsey. The Premier paused to light a cigar. Coxon watched him with a morose frown; he was angry and envious at Medland's disregard of the pretensions which he thought his own achievements justified. Though he was conscious that it would be wisest to say nothing, he could not help observing,

"Well, I hope it will be a long time before I am asked to change service under you for service under Norburn."

Medland's quick ear caught the note of anger.

"Well," he said, "it's ill prophesying. Time brings its own leaders. I know Norburn and you will work loyally together anyhow, whatever positions you hold to one another."

This polite concession did not appease Coxon.

"There is much that I distrust in his methods and aims," he remarked.

"I mustn't listen to this, my dear fellow."

"Of course I say it in strict——"

"Yes, but still—I should say the same to Norburn."

They walked on a few steps, and the Premier had just taken his cigar from his mouth in order to resume the conversation, when a man stepped up to him, appearing, as it seemed, from among the trees, and said,

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Medland?"

The speaker was dressed smartly, but not well, in a new suit of light clothes. He was tall and strongly built; a full grey beard made it a matter of difficulty to distinguish his features clearly in the dim light.

"I beg pardon, I don't think I've the pleasure of knowing you, but I shall be very happy. What is it, sir?"

"A word in private," said the stranger, "if this gentleman will excuse me."

In response to a glance from his chief, Coxon said good-night and strolled on, hearing Medland say,

"I seem to know your voice, but I can't lay my hand on your name."

The stranger drew nearer to him.

"I pass by the name of Benham now," he said; "I haven't forgotten you. I've too good cause to remember you."

Medland looked at him closely.

"It's only the beard that puzzles you," said the stranger, with a grim smile.

"Benyon!" exclaimed the Premier. "I thought you had left the country. What do you want with me, sir?"

"I have not left the country, and I want a good deal with you, Mr. Premier Medland."

"I lost touch of you four years ago."

"Yes; it ceased to matter what became of me about then, didn't it?"

"Have you been in the same place?"

"No; I broke. I have been up country."

"What brings you here? If you wanted money you could have written."

"I've never asked you for money. I wouldn't come to you if I wasn't hard put to it."

"What do you want then?"

"Is that all you have to say to me? Have you no regret to express to me?"

"Not an atom," said the Premier, puffing at his cigar. "If I'd felt any regret I should have expressed it long ago."

"Time doesn't seem to bring repentance to you."

"Don't talk nonsense. What do you want with me?"

"Well, yes, business is business. Look here! I am a respected man where I live. My name is

known at Shepherdstown. Benham is, I say, a respected name."

"Well?"

"Now, here in Kirton I'm not known. I was never here in my life before. No one would recognise me as the man whose——"

"As Benyon? I suppose not. Well?"

"Taking all that into account, I see no reason why I shouldn't get the vacant Inspectorship of Railways. It's a nice place, and it's in your gift."

Mr. Medland raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"It involves travelling most of the time," pursued Benham, "and I needn't live in Kirton, if you preferred that arrangement."

"You are very considerate."

"You see you owe me something."

"Which I might pay out of the public purse? Is that your suggestion?"

"Oh, come, we're men of business. You're not on a platform."

"No," said Mr. Medland meditatively. "I am not on a platform. Consequently I feel at libert-- to tell you—" he paused and smiled again.

"Well?"

"To go to the devil!" said the Premier.

"Take care! I know a good deal about you. There are many men would be glad to know, definitely, what I know."

"Then ask them for an Inspectorship."

Benham drew a step nearer.

"Ay, and I can hit you nearer home."

"You might have, once. What can you do now? She's safe from you," answered Medland, with a frown.

"Yes, she's safe, but there's the daughter."

"Daisy!"

"Yes, Daisy." And he added, in slow, emphatic tones—"Yes, my daughter Daisy."

Medland was about to answer violently, but he curbed his temper and said quietly,

"Your daughter? Come, don't talk nonsense."

"A daughter born to my wife in wedlock is my daughter. If I claim her, what answer is there?"

"I can prove that she's not your daughter."

"Perhaps; and what an edifying sight! The Premier proving—" Mr. Benham broke off with a laugh that sounded loud and harsh in the silent night air.

Medland ground his heel into the gravel.

"How it will please your Methodist friends, and the swells at Government House! You can tell 'em all about that trip to Meadow Beach under the name of—what was it?—Christie, wasn't it? And about your night-flitting, and——"

"Hold your tongue."

"Oh, there's no one to hear now. You won't like proving all that, will you? No, no, the girl will come to her loving father! Take a minute to think it over, Medland—take just a minute. An Inspectorship's no great matter to a politician, you know. You're not so mighty pure as all that! Take a minute. I can wait," and he flung himself on to a bench and lit a cheroot.

Then, in Digby Square, at two o'clock in the morning, the devil tempted "Jimmy" Medland. The man had indeed hit him close—very close. He had hit him in the love he bore his daughter, and in the love he bore her mother and her mother's fame. He had hit him in his love of place and power, and his nobler joy in using them for what

seemed to him good purposes. Love and tenderness—pride and ambition—the man shot his arrow at all. And as Medland stood motionless in thought, across these abiding reflections came now and again a new one—the image of a face that had been that night upturned to his almost in worship, and would, if this thing were done, be turned away in sorrow, shame, and scorn.

What, after all, was an Inspectorship? It was only doing what the world said all politicians did. What, compared with losing love and power and fair fame, was it to—job an Inspectorship? Besides, from one point of view, the man had a kind of claim upon him: he had done him wrong.

"I dare say," interrupted Benham, "that you're thinking there's nothing to prevent me 'asking for more' next month. Well, of course there isn't. But I sha'n't. I only want a decent position and a decent income, and then I'll let you alone. Come, Medland, rancour apart, you know I'm not a common blackmailer."

This remark tickled Medland, and he smiled. Still, it was true in its way. He had known the man very well, and, harsh though he was to all about him, the man had been fairly honest and had borne a decent name. Probably what he was doing now did not seem to him much worse than any other backstairs method of getting on in the world. Medland thought that in all likelihood, if he gained his request, he would keep his word. That thought made the temptation stronger, but it forced itself on him when he remembered the number of years during which he had been even more vulnerable in one respect than he was now, and yet the man had left him alone. He could say neither yes nor no.

"You must give me a few days for consideration," he said.

Benham shrugged his shoulders in amazement.

"Have you promised the berth?" he asked.

"No, I haven't promised it."

"Got another candidate?"

"Only the man who ought to have it," answered the Premier, and Benham's air so infected him that he felt the answer to be a very weak one.

"You see," objected Benham, "from what I can learn you're only in office from day to day, so to speak, and where shall I be if you get turned out?"

"We're safe anyhow till the Assembly meets, ten days hence."

"All right. I'll give you till then. And really, Jimmy Medland, little reason as I have to love you, I should advise you not to be a fool. Here's my address. You can write."

"I sha'n't write. I may send or come."

Benham laughed.

"He's got some wits about him, after all! Good-night. Mind giving me a fair start? You used to be a hot-tempered fellow and—however, I suppose Premiers can't afford the luxury of assaults."

"I'm sorry to say they can't," said Mr. Medland. "I'll wait five minutes where I am."

"All right. Good-night," and Mr. Benham disappeared among the trees.

At the end of five minutes the Premier resumed his interrupted walk and soon reached his home. His study showed signs of his daughter's presence. Her fan was on the table, her gloves beside it; on the mantelpiece lay a red rose, its stalk bound round with wire. Medland recognised it as like

the bud Dick Derosne had worn in his button-hole.

"The young rascal!" he said, as he mixed himself some brandy-and-water, and sat down to his desk. The table was covered with drafts of his new bill, and he pulled the papers into shape, arranged his blotting-pad, and dipped his pen in the ink. Then he lit his pipe and rested his head on the back of his chair, staring up at the ceiling. And there he stayed till the servant, coming in at six o'clock, found him hastily snatching up the pen and seeming to make a memorandum. Being Premier, she said, was killing him, and, "for my part," she added, "I don't care how soon we're out."

CHAPTER VII

A COMMON SPECTACLE

AFTER some anxious consideration, Eleanor Scaife decided to keep silence for the present about Mrs. Puttock's strange remark. That lady had deluged her with such a flood of gossip, that Eleanor felt that a thing was not likely to be true merely because Mrs. Puttock asserted it, while, if the suggested scandal had a basis in fact, it was probable that some of the men of the Governor's household, or indeed the Governor himself, would be well informed on the matter. If so, Lord Eynesford would use his discretion in telling his wife. Eleanor was afraid that, if she interfered, she might run the risk of appearing officious, and of receiving the polite snub which Lady Eynesford was somewhat of an adept in administering. After all, the woman, whoever she was, was dead and gone, and Eleanor, in the absence of fuller knowledge, declined to be shocked. A woman, she reflected, who studies the problems of society, must be prepared for everything. Still, she felt that intimacy with the Medlands was not to be encouraged, and began to range herself by Lady Eynesford's side so far as the Premier was concerned.

"We had a delightful trip," said Lady Eynesford, on the afternoon of the day following the dance. "I hope everything has been going on well here, Eleanor. What was it like at Sir John's?"

"They missed you and the Governor very much."

"Oh, I don't matter, and I hope Dick represented Willie, and danced with everybody's wife in turn. That's poor Willie's duty."

This programme was so very different from that which Dick had planned and carried out on his own account, that Eleanor shrank from the deceit involved in acquiescence.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "You see, Dick's young and hasn't got a wife of his own."

"*Tant mieux*, he'd feel the contrast less," replied Lady Eynesford, with airy assurance. "Who did he dance with?"

Eleanor racked her memory and produced the names of four ladies with each of whom Dick had danced one hasty waltz.

"That's only four dances," objected Lady Eynesford.

"Oh, I didn't notice. I was talking to Sir John and to Mrs. Puttock."

"Eleanor!"

"Well then, he danced once or twice with little Daisy Medland. It was her first ball, you know."

"He needn't have done it twice; I suppose he was bound to once. Dear me! We shall have to consider what we're to do about her now."

"She's a pretty girl, Mary."

"Did Dick think so?" asked Lady Eynesford quickly.

Eleanor distinguished between Mrs. Puttock's remark and Dick's conduct. "Well, it looked like it," she answered.

"What do you mean?"

"To tell the truth, Mary, he danced with her

half the evening, and, I think, would have gone on all night if Lady Perry hadn't stopped it."

"The wretched boy!"

At this moment the wretched boy happened to enter Lady Eynesford's boudoir. Dick was dressed for riding, was humming a tune, and appeared generally well pleased with himself and the world.

"You wretched boy!" said his sister-in-law.

Dick gave her one glance. Then, assuming an air of trepidation, he murmured reproachfully,

"*Nous sommes trahis.*"

"What have you to say for yourself? No, I'm not joking. I particularly wanted to avoid being mixed up with these Medlands one bit more than we could help, and, directly my back is turned, you go and——"

"Have you seen Alicia yet?" asked Dick.

"Seen Alicia? No, not to talk to."

"Well then, keep some of it. Don't spend it all on me. You'll want it, Mary."

"Dick, you're very impertinent. What do you mean?"

Dick was about to answer, when he saw Eleanor frowning at him. He raised his brows. Eleanor rapidly returned the signal.

"She flirted disgracefully with Sir John," he said.

"How dare you make fun of me like that? It was most foolish and—and wrong of you. I shall speak to Willie about it."

"I thought it was the constitutional thing to do," pleaded Dick, but Lady Eynesford was already on her way to the door, and vanished through it with a scornful toss of her head.

"You gave me away," said Dick to Eleanor.

"Never trust a woman! And, Eleanor, what were you nodding like an old mandarin for?"

"I thought it just as well we shouldn't vex Mary just now by telling her how—how friendly Alicia was with Mr. Medland."

"Oh, I see. I wish you'd thought it just as well not to vex Mary by telling her how—how friendly I was with Miss Medland."

"It's quite different," said Miss Scaife coldly. "In Alicia, it was merely strange. Mr. Medland might be her father. Now, Miss Medland——"

"I never let on about you and Coxon," said Dick, who wished to change the subject, and made his escape under shelter of Miss Scaife's indignant repudiation.

Still humming his tune, he mounted his horse and rode to the Public Park. At a particular turn of the avenue he pulled up and waited under a tree. Presently a pony-carriage appeared in the distance.

"Good!" said Dick, throwing away his cigarette and feeling if his neck-cloth were in its place. The pony-cart drew near. Dick saw with pleasure the figure of the driver, but he also perceived, to his great disgust, that a man was sitting by her side.

"That's the way they"—he meant women—"let you in!" he remarked. "Anybody would have supposed she meant she drove alone. Who the deuce has she got there?"

Miss Medland had Norburn with her, and Norburn was just explaining to her—for he did not imitate her father's forbearance—the methods by which he proposed to banish the evil monster, competition, from the world. There is, however, one sort of competition, at least, which Norburn's meth-

ods will hardly banish, and it was into the clutches of this particular form of the evil monster that Mr. Norburn was, little as he thought it, about to be pushed. A long period of intimacy and favour excluded from his mind the suspicion that he might have to fight for his position with Daisy Medland; and, if he could have brought himself to entertain the thought of a successful rival—of some one who, coming suddenly between, should break the strong bonds of affection well tried by time—he certainly would not have expected to find such a competitor in Dick Derosne. In fact, neither of the young men was capable of appreciating the attractions of the other: Dick considering Norburn very doubtfully a gentleman, and very certainly what in his University days he dubbed a "smug"; Norburn regarding him with the rather impatient contempt that such a man is apt to bestow on those for whom dressing themselves and amusing themselves are the chief labours of a day. Moreover, Norburn did not frequent dances, and young men who do not frequent dances often go wrong by forgetting how much may happen between the afternoon of a Tuesday and the morning of a Wednesday.

No doubt those of us who are men, having been more or less pretty fellows in our time, have had our triumphs, concerning which we are, as a rule, becomingly mute, but occasionally, in the confidences of the smoking-room, undesirably loquacious. For this fault there is no excuse, unless such a one as justifies the practice of inflicting reprisals in international quarrels; it being quite certain that our failures are no secret—indeed there must be covertly (but extensively) circulating somewhere a *Gazette* wherein such occurrences are reg-

istered—there is a kind of "wild justice" even in smoking-room disclosures. But whatever our bad or good fortune may have been, it is not to be supposed for a moment that any of us enjoy such an enchanting revelation as comes to a young girl who, by nature's kind freak, has been made beautiful. Daisy Medland was radiant as she turned from Norburn's pale thoughtful face and careless garb to Dick Derosne, the outward perfection of a well-born, well-made, well-dressed Englishman, bowing, smiling, and debonair. Daisy liked Norburn very much—how much she never quite knew—but there was no doubt that two young men were a pleasant change from one, and the contrast between them increased the charm—a novel charm to her—of the situation, for she was well aware that, different as they were from one another, strong as the contrast was, they were both at this moment thinking precisely the same thought, namely, "Who's this fellow, and what does he want?"—a coincidence which again shows that Norburn's theories had much to do before they conquered the world.

It is not a very uncommon sight to see a clever man sit mum, abashed by the chatter of a cheery shallow-pate, who is happily unconscious of the oppressive triviality of his own conversation. Norburn's eager flow of words froze at the contact of Dick's small-talk, and he was a discontented auditor of ball-room and club gossip. It amazed him that a man should know, or care, or talk about more than half the things on which Dick descanted so merrily; it astounded him that they should win interest as keen and looks as bright as had ever rewarded the deepest truth or the highest

aspiration. All of which, however, was not really at all odd, if only Mr. Norburn would have considered the matter a little more closely. But then an old favourite threatened by a new rival is not in a mood for cool analysis.

"And they say," pursued Dick, "that Puttock's coming back to your father because Sir Robert trod on Mrs. P.'s new black silk and tore it half off her—tore it awfully, you know."

Daisy laughed gaily.

"You weren't there, were you, Mr. Norburn? Well, it was worth all the money only to see old Mrs. Grim eat ices—you remember, Miss Medland? She bolted three while Sir John was proposing the Queen's health, and two more in the first verse of 'God save—'" and so Dick ran on.

Mr. Norburn consulted his watch.

"I'm afraid I must go," he said. "I'm due at the office."

"Oh," exclaimed Daisy penitently, "I forgot. But can't I drive you back?"

"I couldn't trouble you to do that. You're not going back so soon?"

"But of course I can, Mr. Norburn; it's so far to walk."

"I don't mind the walk."

"Are you really quite sure? It is a beautiful morning to be out, isn't it?"

Norburn took his leave, thinking, no doubt, of his official duties and nothing else, and Daisy touched her pony.

"I must go on," she said.

"So must I," said Dick, "mustn't keep my horse standing any longer."

"Why not? He can't catch cold to-day."

"Oh, he'd take root and never go away—just as I do, when I stand near you, you know."

it is not proposed to set out the rest of their conversation. Daisy forgot Norburn's gloomy face, Dick forgot every face but Daisy's, and the usual things were said and done. An appeal to the memory of any reader will probably give a result accurate enough. Imagine yourself on a pretty morning, in a pretty place, by a pretty girl, and let her be kind and you not a numskull, and there's half-a-dozen pages saved.

It was, however, a little unfortunate that, at the last moment, when the third good-bye was being said, Lady Eynesford should come whirling by in her barouche.

"The deuce!" said Dick under his breath.

Lady Eynesford's features did not relax. She bowed to her brother-in-law gravely and stiffly; her gaze appeared to travel far over the top of the low pony-carriage which contained Daisy Medland. Dick flushed with vexation. True, the Governor's wife did not yet know the Premier's daughter, but she need not have insisted on the fact so ostentatiously. Dick turned to his companion. She was laughing.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked, rather offended. A man seldom likes to be thought to value the opinion of the women of his family, valuable as it always is.

"You know very well," she answered. "Oh, I dare say I've got into trouble too."

"I don't care," said Dick valiantly.

"Neither do I—at least, not much."

"I don't see how you can have got into trouble."

"Ah, perhaps you don't see everything, Mr. Derosne."

"I say, you don't mean that Mr.——?"

"Good-bye," said Daisy, whipping up her pony.

Dick was left wondering what she had meant, and whether anything so preposterous and revolting as the idea of Norburn having any business to control her doings or her likings could possibly have any truth in it. And, as a natural result of this disturbing notion, he determined to see her again as soon as he could.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR THE HIGHEST BIDDER

SHEPHERDSTOWN, the spot where Mr. Benham said that his was a respected name—and he said quite truly, for he had managed to pay his debts as they fell due, and nothing was known against his character—lay in Puttock's constituency, and Benham thought it well to call upon his representative. The only secret part of his enterprise had been transacted with the Premier in Digby Square: for the rest, a plausible overtness of action was plainly desirable. He obtained an interview with Puttock, and laid before him his hopes and his qualifications. Mr. Puttock was graciousness itself; he remembered, with gratitude and surprising alacrity, his visitor's local services to the party; had he been still in office, it would have been his delight no less than his duty to press Benham's incontestable claims; he would have felt that he was merely paying a small part of the debt he owed Shepherdstown and one of its leading men, and would, at the same time, have enjoyed the conviction that he was enlisting in the public service a man of tried integrity and ability.

"Unhappily, however," said Mr. Puttock, spreading out his plump hands in pathetic fashion, "as you might conjecture, Mr.—" he glanced at the visitor's card—"Benham, my influence at the present juncture is less than *nil*. I am powerless. I can only look on at what I conceive to be a course

of conduct fraught with peril to the true interests of New Lindsey, and entirely inconsistent with the best traditions of our party."

"Your views are heartily shared at home," responded Benham. "Speaking in confidence, I can assure you of that, sir. Our confidence in the Ministry ended when you retired."

"As long as my constituents approve of my action, I am content. But I am grieved not to be able to help you."

"But, in spite of present differences, surely your good word would carry weight. My name is, I believe, already before the Premier, and if it was backed by your support——"

"Let me recommend you," said Puttock sourly, "to try to obtain Mr. Norburn's good word. That is, between ourselves, all-powerful."

Benham frowned.

"Norburn! Much Norburn would do for me."

"Why, does he know you?" asked Puttock. "Have you any quarrel with him?"

"There's no love lost between us. He organised my shearers when they struck two years ago."

"What are you?"

"Sheep, sir. The fellow came down and fought me, and—well, sir, he said things about me that you'd hardly credit."

"Oh, I hope," said Puttock earnestly, "that that would not influence his judgment. But, to be frank—well, it's common knowledge that Mr. Norburn and I found we could not work together."

"But surely, sir, the Premier will take his own line?"

"I don't know. As likely as not, Norburn will have some Labour man to press."

"Ah, if we could see you at the head of the Government!"

"I don't deny that I am deeply disappointed with the Premier's course of action—so deeply that I can give him no support."

Mr. Benham remained silent for a minute, meditating. He perceived that, in case Medland proved unreasonable, a second string lay ready to his hand. He wondered how much Puttock already knew—and what he would pay for more knowledge. The worst of it was that Puttock had the reputation of being an uncommonly good hand at a bargain.

"Yet Mr. Medland's a very clever man," he observed.

"Oh, clever, yes; but I fear unstable, Mr. Benham."

"I suppose so. After all a man's private life is some guide, isn't it?"

"Some guide!" exclaimed Puttock. "Surely you understate the case. If a man's private life is discreditable——"

"But would you go so far as that about the Premier?" inquired Benham, with a pained air.

"There's no smoke without fire, I'm afraid. It's a painful subject, and of course only a matter of rumour, but——"

"You see, I've been living in the country, and I'm not up in all that's said here."

"I wouldn't mention it to everybody, but to you I may venture. According to the report among those in a position to know, there was the gravest doubt as to the regularity of—his domestic relations."

"Dear, dear!"

"Nothing, as I say, is known or could, probably,

be proved. It would damage him most seriously of course, if that sort of thing were proved."

"I should think so indeed. He could hardly remain where he is."

"I don't know. Well, perhaps not. A little while ago I should have deeply regretted anything calculated to lessen his influence, but now—well, well, we shall see."

"Your secession has so weakened him that he couldn't stand up against it," said Benham, with conviction. "And then—why, we might have a real leader."

Mr. Benham's admiring gaze left no doubt as to the heaven-sent leader who was in his mind, and he had the satisfaction of detecting a gleam of eagerness in Mr. Puttock's eye.

"He may be of use to me, if Medland kicks," reflected Benham as he walked away. But he hoped that the Premier would not prove recalcitrant. He had counted on the sufficiency of threats, and it would be an annoyance if he were forced to resort to action ; for he could not deny that his respected name would suffer some stain in the process of inflicting punishment, if the victim chose to declare the terms on which the chastisement might have been averted.

Now this aspect of the case had presented itself to Medland also, reinforcing the considerations which weighed against giving Benham the appointment he sought. The Premier hated yielding, and he hated jobs : Benham asked him to acknowledge himself beaten, and, as ransom, to perpetrate a peculiarly dirty job. At most times of his life he would not even have looked at such a proposal, but his new-won position, with its possibilities and

its risks, made him timid: he was fearful as a child of anything that would jeopardise what he had so hardly and narrowly achieved; and this unwonted mood increased his dread of Benham's disclosures to an almost superstitious terror. Under the influence of this feeling, he was so far false to his standard of conduct as tentatively to mention Benham's name to Norburn as that of a possible candidate for the vacant post. He expected to hear in reply nothing more than a surprised inquiry as to the man's claims, but Norburn, despite his faithfulness to every wish of his leader's, besought him earnestly to make no such choice.

"You don't know about him," he said; "but in his own neighbourhood he's known far and wide as a hard employer and a determined enemy of the Unions. Such an appointment would do us immense harm."

"I didn't know that. You're sure?"

"I believe it might cost us a dozen votes. I couldn't defend the choice myself. I fought him once, and I know all about him. Who recommended him to you?"

"No one. He came himself."

Norburn laughed.

"It needs some assurance," he remarked, "for a man with his record to come to you. He must have known that I could tell you all about him."

The Premier smiled: to tell him all about Benham was exactly what his zealous young colleague could not do.

"Then it's quite out of the question?" he asked.

"If you take my opinion, quite."

The Premier gave a sigh of relief. He was glad to have the matter settled for him, and to be saved

from the temptation that had been besetting him these ten days past.

"The fellow must be mad to expect such a thing," continued Norburn. "Why doesn't he go to the other side?"

"Perhaps he will now," answered Medland. It seemed not at all unlikely.

When his mind was finally made up, Medland found at first a reckless pleasure in, as he expressed it to himself, "chancing it." He had always been fond of a fight against odds. The odds were against him here, and the stakes perilously high. His spirits rose; his mouth was set firm, and his eyes gleamed as they had gleamed when the crowd led him in triumph to his house three weeks ago. The battle was to begin to-morrow; the House met then, and all his foes, public and private, would close round him and his band of friends. And, when the fresh attack had been delivered, how many would his friends be? Rousing himself, he got up.

"You stay with Daisy," he said to Norburn. "I must go out for an hour."

It was nine o'clock, and he made his way swiftly to the address which Benham had given him. He found that gentleman in a quiet and respectable lodging, and was received with civility.

"You are just to your time," said Benham.

"I'm not behind it. I had till to-morrow."

"And you have brought the appointment?"

"No."

"The promise of it, then?"

"No; I can't do it."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't know why I should tell you, but

for two good reasons—it's difficult and it's dirty. Difficult because you're not popular with my friends—dirty, because—but you know that."

"You really mean to refuse?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you going to do for me?"

"I can't do anything for you."

"That's final?" asked Benham, facing him squarely. "You utterly refuse to do me a small favour, though you were ready enough to ruin my life?"

Medland was doubtful if he had ruined the man's life, but he only answered—

"I can't job you into anything. That's what you want, and it's what I can't do for you."

"Very well. I've got a thing of value, haven't I? Well, I shall sell it to the highest bidder. Ay, and I tell you what, James Medland, I'll be level with you before I die, God help me I will! You shall be sorry for this, before I've done with you."

"I take the chance of that. If you're in want, I'll supply you with money, as far as my means allow."

"Your means? What are they? You won't have your salary long, if I can help it. I think I can find a better market, thank you."

Medland turned on his heel. He had come with a vague idea of trying in some way to smooth over matters between them. It was plainly impossible; he had no wish to bribe, and, if he had, clearly he could not bribe high enough. He was still in his confident mood, and Benham's rude threats roused him to defiance.

"Have it your own way," he said; "but people

who attack me in Kirton run some risks," and he went out with a smile on his face.

As he strolled home again, his exultant temper left him. The springiness of his step relaxed into a slouching gait, and his head fell forward. He stopped and turned half round, as though to go back; then, with a sigh, he held on his way. Far off, he could see the twinkling lights of ships, and, in the still of evening, catch the roll of the sea as it broke on the beach, and an odd fancy came over him of sailing far away with his daughter over the sea—or, perhaps better still, of walking quietly into the water until it closed over his head. Now and then he grew tired of fighting, and to him life was all fighting now.

"Meditating new resolutions, Medland?" asked a cheery voice at his side.

Turning with a start, he saw the Chief Justice, who continued,

"You'll be in the thick of it to-morrow, I suppose?"

"I have left off thinking where I shall be to-morrow," he answered. "To-day is enough for a Minister."

"And to-morrow may be too much? Young Heseltine offered just now to lay me six to five you'd be out in a month."

"Confound him! Who is he?"

"One of the Governor's young fellows.

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"Talking of that, I had some very kind inquiries about you at Government House to-day."

"Ah!"

"From Miss Derosne. She's a warm admirer of yours, and really a most charming girl. Well,

good-night. I shall try and get down to hear your statement to-morrow."

Sir John bustled off, leaving the Premier with a new bent of thought. In his mind he rehearsed his interview with Alicia Derosne, wondering, as men wonder after they have been carried away by emotion into unrestrained disclosures of their hearts, whether she had really been impressed; whether, after all, he had not been, or seemed, insincere, theatrical, or absurd; wondering again in what light she would look on him, when she knew what it looked likely all Kirton would know soon; wondering last whether, if he had not met the woman who had been his partner in life for so long, and had, in youth, met such a girl as Alicia Derosne, his fate would have been different, and he need not now have trembled at his story being told. Immersed in thought he wandered on, out of the town and down to the shores of the bay, and checked himself, with a sudden laugh, only on the very brink of the sea. The absurdity struck him; he laughed again, as he lit a cigar and rebuked himself aloud.

"Here I am, a Premier and forty-one! and I'm going on for all the world like a cross between a love-sick boy and a runaway criminal!"

He paused and added,

"And the worst of it, I am rather like a criminal and——"

He paused abruptly. A thought struck him and made him frown angrily at his folly. It was stupid to think of himself as love-sick, even in jest. He had not come to that. And to think of himself as a lover was not a thought that carried pleasant memories to Mr. Medland.

CHAPTER IX

TWO HASTY UTTERANCES

"THANK God, there's the Legislative Council, anyhow!" exclaimed Mr. Kilshaw.

Sir Robert Perry pursed up his lips. He had fought with that safeguard of stability behind him once or twice before, and the end had been defeat. There were better things than the support of the Legislative Council.

"I'd rather," he remarked, "have a dissolution and a thumping campaign fund. If I'd known they were at sixes and sevens like this, I'd have taken the Governor's offer."

"Hum," said Mr. Kilshaw, who would be expected to subscribe largely to the suggested fund. "But how do you propose to get your dissolution now? Besides, I believe he'd beat us."

"That would depend on Puttock—and one or two more."

"What did you think of Puttock's explanation?"

"The whole performance reminded me of a highly religious rattlesnake: it was a magnificent struggle against natural venom."

"I thought it very creditable."

"Oh, I suppose so: it would be, if you think of it, in the snake. But Medland will be replying soon. Come along."

They hurried into the House, and found the Premier already on his legs. The floor and the galleries were crowded, and the space allotted to

ladies—there was no grating in New Lindsey, as Eleanor Scaife had already recorded in her notebook—was bright with gay colours. Sir Robert and Mr. Kilshaw slipped into their places just in time to see Medland stoop down to Norburn, who sat next him, and whisper to him. Norburn nodded with a defiant air, and Medland, with a slight frown, proceeded. The Premier had no easy task. Puttock had fallen on his flank with skill and effect, and Norburn, who followed, had increased his leader's difficulties by a brilliant but indiscreet series of tilts against every section except that to which he himself belonged; Jewell had answered powerfully, and Coxon had coughed and fidgeted. The Premier was now skilfully paring away what his lieutenant had said, and justifying every proposition he advanced by a reference to Mr. Puttock's previous speeches. Mr. Puttock, in his turn, fidgeted, and Coxon smiled sardonically. The Premier, encouraged by this success, pulled himself together and approached the last and most delicate part of his task, which was to defend or palliate a phrase of Norburn's that had been greeted with angry groans and protests. Mr. Norburn had in fact referred to the Capitalist class as a "parasitic growth," and Medland was left to get out of this indiscretion as best he could. He referred to the unhappy phrase. The storm which had greeted its first appearance broke out again. There were cries of "Withdraw!" Mr. Kilshaw called out, "Do you adopt that? Yes or no;" Norburn's followers cheered; redoubled groans answered them; Eleanor made notes, and Alicia's eyes were fixed on Medland, who stood silent and smiling.

Kilshaw cried again, "Do you adopt it?"

Medland turned toward him, and in slow and measured tones began to describe a visit he had paid to Kilshaw's mill. He named no name, but everybody knew to whose works he referred.

"There was a man there," he said, "working with a fever upon him; there was a woman working—and by her, her baby, five days old; there were old men who looked to no rest but the grave, and children who were always too tired to play; there were girls without innocence, boys without merriment, women without joy, men without hope. And, as I walked home in the evening, back to my house, I met a string of race-horses; they were in training, I was told, for the Kirton Cup; their owner spent, they said, ten thousand pounds a year on his stables. Their owner, Sir, owned the mill —and them that worked there."

He paused, and then, with a gesture unusual in that place, he laid his hand on Norburn's shoulder, and went on in a tone of gentle apology:

"What wonder if men with hot hearts and young heads use hard words? What wonder if they confound the bad with the good? Yes, what wonder if, once again, good and bad shall fall in a common doom?"

He sat down suddenly, still keeping his hand on his young colleague's shoulder, and Sir Robert rose and prayed leave to say a few words in reference to the—he seemed to pause for a word—the remarkable utterance which had fallen from the Premier. Sir Robert's rapier flashed to and fro, now in grave indignation, now in satirical jest, and, at the end, he rose almost to eloquence in bidding the Premier remember the responsibility such words, spoken by such a man, carried with them.

"You may say," said Sir Robert, "that to prophesy revolution is not to justify it—that to excuse violence is not to advocate it. Ignorant men reck little of wire-drawn distinctions, and I am glad, Sir—I say, I am glad that not on my head rests the weight of such wild words and open threats as we have heard to-day. For my head is grey, and I must soon give an account of what I have done."

The debate ended, leaving the general impression that the Government stood committed to a policy which some called thorough and some dangerous. Mr. Kilshaw, passing Puttock in the lobby, remarked,

"You'll have some fine opportunities for your 'independent and discriminating support,' Puttock, and I hope your banking account will be the fatter for it."

Puttock made a slight grimace, and Kilshaw smiled complacently. He had great hopes of Puttock, and was pleased when the latter remarked,

"By the way, Kilshaw, here's a friend of mine who's anxious to know you," and he introduced his influential constituent, Mr. Benham of Shepherdstown. The three men stood talking together and saw Medland pass by. Kilshaw, assuming Benham loved the Premier no more than Mr. Puttock, remarked,

"I'd give something handsome to see that fellow smashed."

"Would you?" asked Benham, with an eager smile; Kilshaw promised him a better opening than Puttock. He stepped across to Medland, raising his hat.

"A moment, Mr. Medland. You have not changed your mind on that little matter?"

"The appointment was made this morning," replied Medland, somewhat surprised to see him in the lobby.

"I am here with Mr. Puttock," said Benham, answering his look, "and Mr. Kilshaw."

Medland smiled.

"The appointment is made all the same," he remarked.

Benham bowed and returned to his friends. The Premier, seeing Eleanor and Alicia in front of him, overtook and joined them.

"Are you walking home?" he asked.

"Mr. Coxon is escorting us," answered Eleanor, indicating that gentleman, who was walking with them.

Perhaps Mr. Coxon in his day-dreams looked forward to the time when he should fight the Premier for his place and defeat him. He did not expect to have to fight with him for a position by a girl's side. Nevertheless he found, to his chagrin, that Medland did not pair off with Eleanor Scaife, but continued to walk by and talk to Alicia. Being a man of much assurance, he hazarded a protesting glance at Alicia: she met it with an impossible intensity of unconsciousness, and Eleanor maliciously opened fire upon him out of the batteries with which Tomes supplied her, at the same time quickening her pace and compelling him to leave the others behind.

Alicia glanced up at Medland.

"I thought of what you said the other night all the time," she began; "but you did not say it so well to-day."

"Ah, you remember the other night?"

"You were bold and straightforward then. I thought—I thought you fenced with it a little to-day."

"I'm not used to be charged with that."

"I suppose it was only by comparison."

"Yes. And nobody but you could make the comparison."

"I shall always like best to remember you by what you said then."

"Ah, I had to please so many people to-day. The other night I didn't think of pleasing any one—not even you! But I hope it's not coming to 'remembering' me yet. You're not going to leave us?"

"We're only birds of passage, you know. My brother's term will be up in fifteen months now."

"Well, Miss Derosne, I'm afraid fifteen months are likely enough to see an end of most of the dreams I talked about to you."

"No, no," she exclaimed eagerly. Then checking herself she added, "But what right have I to talk to you about it?"

"I talked to you."

"Oh, I happened to be there."

"Yes, and so I happened to talk. That's the way when people get on together."

Alicia looked up with a smile. Short as her acquaintance had been, she felt that the Premier was no longer a stranger. By opening his mind to her as he had done, he had claimed nothing less than friendship. He was, she told herself, like an old friend. And yet he was also unlike one; for, in intercourse with old friends, people are not subject alternately to impulses toward unrestrained

intimacy and reactions to shy reserve. She liked him, but she was afraid of him; in fine, she was hardly happy with him, and not happy— The confession could not be finished even to herself.

"Shall you be glad to go home, or sorry?" he asked.

"Oh, I shall be very sorry."

"Then," he suggested, smiling, "why not stay?"

The question came pat in tune with those thoughts that would not be suppressed. Before she knew what she was doing—before she had time to reflect that probably his words were merely an idle civility or the playful suggestion of an impossibility, she exclaimed,

"What do you——?"

She stopped suddenly, in horror at herself; for she found him looking at her with surprise, and she felt her face flooded with colour.

"I beg your pardon?" said Medland.

Full of anger and shame, she could not answer him. Without a shadow of excuse—she could not find a shadow of excuse—she had read into his words a meaning he never thought of. She could not now conceive how she had done it. If told the like about another, she knew how scornfully severe her judgment would have been. He had surprised her, caught her unawares, and wrung from her an open expression of a wild idea that she had refused to recognise even in her own heart. She felt that her cheeks were red. Would the glow that burnt her never go?—and she bit her lips, for she was near tears. Oh, that he might not have seen! Or had she committed the sin unpardonable to a girl such as she was? Had she betrayed herself unasked?

"Nothing," she stammered at last. "Nothing."

But she felt the heat still in her cheeks. She would have given the world to be able to tell him not to look at her; but she knew his puzzled eyes still sought hers, in hope of light.

He might at least say something! Silently he walked by her side along the road to Government House—that endless, endless road. She could not speak—and he—she only knew that he did not. She felt, by a subtle perception, his glance turned on her now and again, but he did not break the silence. The strain was too much; in spite of all her efforts, in spite of a hatred of her own weakness that would have made her, for the moment, sooner die, a hysterical sob burst from her lips.

Medland stopped.

"You must let me go," he said. "I am very busy. You can overtake the others. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers. It was kind of him to go and make no words about the manner of his going, yet it showed that her desperate hope that he had not noticed was utterly vain.

"Good-bye," she managed to murmur, with averted head.

"I shall see you again soon," he said, pressing her hand, and was gone.

In the evening, Lady Eynesford trenchantly condemned the ventilation of the Houses of Parliament.

"The wretched place has given Alicia a headache. I found the poor child crying with pain. I wonder you let her stay, Eleanor."

"I didn't notice that it was close or hot."

"My dear Eleanor, you're as strong as a pony," remarked Lady Eynesford. "A very little thing upsets Alicia."

CHAPTER X

THE SMOKE OF HIDDEN FIRES

"No, I don't like turn-down collars," remarked Daisy Medland.

"I'm very sorry," said Norburn. "You never said so before, and they're so comfortable."

"And why don't you wear a high hat, and a frock-coat? It looks so much better. Mr.—well, Mr. Coxon always does when he goes anywhere in the afternoon."

"I didn't know Coxon was your standard of perfection, Daisy. He didn't use to be in the old days."

"Oh, it's not only Mr. Coxon."

"I know it isn't," replied Norburn significantly.

"I wonder the Governor lets you come in that hat," continued Daisy, scornfully eyeing Norburn's unconventional headgear.

"It's very like your father's."

"My father's not a young man. What would you think if the Governor laid foundation-stones in a short jacket and a hat like yours?"

"I should think him a very sensible man."

"Well, I should think him a *guy*," said Miss Medland, with intense emphasis.

This method of treating an old friend galled Norburn excessively. When anger is in, the brains are out.

"I suppose Mr. Derosne is your ideal," he said.

Daisy accepted the opening of hostilities with alacrity.

"He dresses just perfectly," she remarked, "and he doesn't bore one with politics."

This latter remark was rather shameless, for Daisy was generally a keen partisan of her father's, and very ready to listen to anything connected with his public doings.

"You never used to say that sort of thing to me."

"Oh, 'used!' I believe you've said 'used' six times in ten minutes! Am I always to go on talking as I *used* when I was in the nursery? I say it now anyhow, Mr. Norburn."

Norburn took up the despised hat. Looking at it now through Daisy's eyes he could not maintain that it was a handsome hat.

"It's your own fault. You began it," said Daisy, stifling a pang of compunction, for she really liked him very much, else why should she mind what he wore?

"I began it?"

"Yes. By—by dragging in Mr. Derosne."

"I only mentioned him as an example of fashionable youth."

"You know you wouldn't like it if I went about in dowdy old things."

"I don't mind a bit what you wear. It's all the same to me."

"How very peculiar you are!" exclaimed Daisy, with a look of compassionate amazement. "Most people notice what I wear. Oh, and I've got a charming dress for the flower-show at Government House."

"You're invited, are you?" asked Norburn, with an ill-judged exhibition of surprise.

"Of course I'm invited."

"I'm sorry to hear it."

"Why, pray, Mr. Norburn? Are you going?"

"Yes. I suppose I must."

"Not in that hat!" implored Daisy.

"Certainly," answered Norburn, though it is doubtful if he had in truth intended to do so, but for Daisy's taunts.

A tragic silence followed. At last, Miss Medland exclaimed,

"What will Lady Eynesford think of my friends?"

"I didn't know you cared so much for what Lady Eynesford thought. Besides, I need not present myself in that character."

"Oh, if you're going to be disagreeable!"

"For my part, I'm sorry you're going at all."

"Thank you. Is that because I shall enjoy it?"

"I don't care for that sort of society."

"I like it above everything."

Matters having thus reached a direct issue, Norburn clapped the *causa belli* on his head, and walked out of the room, dimly conscious that he had done himself as much harm as he possibly could in the space of a quarter of an hour. When he grew cool, he confessed that the momentary, if real, pleasure of being unpleasant was somewhat dearly bought at the cost of enmity with Daisy Medland. Indeed this unhappy young man, for all that his whole soul was by way of being absorbed in reconstructing society, would have thought most things a bad bargain at such a price. But his bitterness had been too strong. It seemed as though all his devotion, ay, and—he did not scruple to say to himself—all his real gifts were to weigh as nothing against the cut of a coat and the "sit" of a cravat—for to such

elemental constituents his merciless and jealous analysis reduced poor Dick Derosne's attractions.

Little recked Dick of Norburn's feelings in the glow of his triumph. He was convinced that he alone had persuaded Lady Eynesford into including Daisy in her invitation to luncheon at the opening of the flower-show. It would have been a pity, in the mere interests of truth, to interfere with this conceit of Dick's, and Eleanor forbore to disclose her own share in the matter, or to hint at that long interview between the Governor and his wife.

"We shall live to regret it," said Lady Eynesford, "but it shall be as you wish, Willie."

So the Medlands came with the rest of the world to the flower-show, and were received with due ceremony and regaled with suitable fare. And afterward the Governor took Daisy for a stroll through the tents, and, having thus done his duty handsomely, handed her over to Dick; but she and Dick found the tents stuffy and crowded, and sat down under the trees and enjoyed themselves very much, until Mr. Puttock espied them and came up to them, accompanied by a friend.

"I hope you're not very angry with me, Miss Daisy?" said Puttock, thinking she might resent his desertion of the Premier.

"Oh, but I am!" said Daisy, and truly enough, whatever the reason might be.

"Well, you mustn't visit it on my friend here, who is anxious to make your acquaintance. Miss Medland—Mr. Benham."

Benham sat down and began to make himself agreeable. He had a flow of conversation, and seemed in no hurry to move. Captain Heseltine appeared with a summons for Dick, who sulkily

obeyed. Puttock caught sight of Jewell, and, with an apology, pursued him. Benham sat talking to Daisy Medland. Presently he proposed they should go where they would see the people better, and Daisy, who was bored, eagerly acquiesced. They took a seat by the side of the broad gravel walk.

"Will no one rescue me?" thought Daisy.

"He's bound to pass soon," thought Benham.

Benham's wish was the first to be fulfilled. Before long the Premier came in sight, accompanied by Coxon.

"Ah, there's your daughter," said the latter. "You were wondering where she was."

Medland looked, and saw Daisy and Benham sitting side by side. He quickened his pace and went up to them. Benham rose and took off his hat. Medland ignored him.

"I was looking for you, Daisy," he said. "I want you."

Daisy stood up, with relief.

"Good-day, Mr. Medland," said Benham. "I have enjoyed making" (he paused, but barely perceptibly) "Miss Medland's acquaintance."

Medland bowed coldly.

"Mr. Puttock was good enough to introduce me."

"I am ready, father," said Daisy. "Good-bye, Mr. Benham."

Benham took her offered hand, and, with a smile, held it for a moment longer than sufficed for an ordinary farewell. Still holding it, he began—

"I hope we shall meet often in the future and——"

Medland, in a sudden fit of anger, seized his daughter's arm and drew it away.

"I do not desire your acquaintance, sir," he said, in loud, harsh tones, "for myself or my daughter."

Benham smiled viciously; Coxon, who stood by, watched the scene closely.

"Ah!" said Benham, "perhaps not; but you know me—and so will she," and he in his turn raised his voice in growing excitement.

Daisy, frightened at the angry interview, clung to Medland's arm, looking in wonder from him to Benham. Some half-dozen people, seeing the group, stopped for a moment in curiosity and, walking on, cast glances back over their shoulders. A lull in the babble of conversation warned Medland, and he looked round. Alicia Derosne was passing by in company with the Chief Justice. Near at hand stood Kilshaw, watching the encounter with a sneering smile. The Chief Justice stepped up to Medland.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Nothing," said Medland. "Only I do not wish my daughter to talk to this gentleman."

The contempt of his look and tone goaded Benham to fury.

"I don't care what you wish," he exclaimed. "I have as good a right as anybody to talk to the young lady, considering that she's——"

Before he could finish his sentence, Kilshaw darted up to him, and caught him by the arm.

"Not yet, you fool," he whispered, drawing the angry man away.

Benham yielded, and Kilshaw caught Medland's look of surprise.

"Come, Mr. Benham," he said aloud, "you and Mr. Medland must settle your differences, if you have any, elsewhere."

Medland glanced sharply at him, but accepted the cue.

"You are right," he said. "Come, Daisy," and he walked away with his daughter on his arm, while Kilshaw led Benham off in the opposite direction, talking to him urgently in a low voice. Benham shook his head again and again in angry protest, seeming to ask why he had not been allowed his own way.

The group of people passed on, amid inquiries who Benham was, and conjectures as to the cause of the Premier's anger.

"Now what in the world," asked Sir John, fitting his *pince-nez* more securely on his nose, "do you make of that, Miss Derosne?"

Sir John thought that he was addressing an indifferent spectator, and Alicia's manner did not undeceive him.

"How should I know, Sir John? It must have been politics."

"They wouldn't talk politics here—and, if they did, Medland would not quarrel about them."

"Did you hear what he said, Chief Justice?" asked Coxon.

"Yes, I heard."

"Curious, isn't it?"

"It's most tantalisingly curious," said Sir John.

"But, all the same, we mustn't forget the flowers," remarked Alicia, with affected gaiety.

They moved on, and the onlookers, still canvassing the incident, scattered their various ways.

It was Coxon who told Lady Eynesford about it afterward, and her comment to the Governor that evening at dinner was,

"There, Willie! Didn't I tell you something horrid would come of having those people?"

No one answered her. The Governor knew better than to encourage a discussion. Dick swore softly under his breath at Coxon, and Alicia began to criticise Lady Perry's costume. Lady Eynesford followed up her triumph.

"I hope all you Medlandites are satisfied now," she said.

And Lady Eynesford was not the only person who found some satisfaction in this unfortunate incident, for when Daisy told Norburn about it, he remarked, with an extraordinary want of reason,

"I knew you'd be sorry you went."

"I'm not at all sorry," protested Daisy. "But why was father angry?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Didn't he tell you?"

"No."

"Oh, I recollect. This Benham has been worrying him about some appointment."

"That doesn't account for his saying that he had as good a right as anybody to talk to me. I don't understand it."

"Well, neither do I. But you would go."

"Really, you're too absurd," said Daisy pettishly.

And poor Norburn knew that he was very absurd, and yet could not help being very absurd, although he despised himself for it.

The real truth was that Daisy had told him that, except for this one occurrence, she had had a most charming afternoon, and that Dick Derosne had been kindness itself.

This was enough to make even a rising statesman angry, and, when angry, absurd.

CHAPTER XI

A CONSCIENTIOUS MAN'S CONSCIENCE

A VERY few hours after its occurrence, the scene at the flower-show was regretted by all who took part in it. Medland realised the foolishness of his indiscretion and want of temper; Benham was afraid that he might have set inquiring minds on the track of game which he wished to hunt down for himself; Kilshaw was annoyed at having been forced into such an open display of his relations with and his influence over Benham. Even to himself, his dealings with the man were a delicate subject. Almost every one has one or two matters which he would rather not discuss with his own conscience; and his bargain with Benham was one of these tabooed topics to Kilshaw. For, in spite of what he had done in this instance, he belonged to a class which some righteous and superior people will have it does not exist. He was a conscientious politician—a man who, in the main, was honest and straightforward; prone indeed to think that what he had was necessarily identical with what he ought to have, and that any law not based on a recognition of this fact was an iniquitous law, but loyal to his friends, his class, his party, and his country; ready to spend and work for his own rights' sake, but no niggard of time or money in larger causes; sincere in his convictions, dauntless in affirming and upholding them, hardly conceiving that honest men could differ from them; strong in

his self-confidence, believing that the best men always won, suspecting from the bottom of his heart every appeal to sentiment in the mouth of a politician. Such he was—a type of the man of success, with the hardness that success is apt to bring, but with the virtues that attain it; and his defects and merits had made him, for years past, Sir Robert Perry's most valued lieutenant, and a very pillar of the cautious conservative ideas on which that statesman's influence was based.

And now Mr. Kilshaw, impelled less by mere self-interest than by the rankling of a personal feud, had—dipped the end of his fingers in pitch. He had resented fiercely Medland's hardly disguised attack on him, and it had fanned into flame the wrath which the Premier's schemes, threatening the profits of himself and his fellow-capitalists, and the Premier's principles, redolent to his nostrils of the quackery and hypocrisy that he hated, had set alight in his heart. Against such a man and such a policy, was not everything fair? Was it not even fair to use a tool like Benham, if the tool put itself in his hand?

Yet he was ashamed; but, being in secret ashamed, he, as men often do, set his face and went on his way all the more obstinately.

He bought Mr. Benham, Mr. Benham and his secret; they were heartily at his disposal, for he could pay a better price than Puttock could; and he laid them by in his arsenal, for use, he carefully added to himself, only in the very last emergency.

"Not yet, you fool!" he had whispered to his tool in anger and alarm. The tool did not know how dirty it seemed to the hand that was to use it, and yet shrank from using it until the very last.

But if it came to the very last—why, he would use it; and Mr. Kilshaw inspected the pitch on the end of his fingers, and almost convinced himself that it was not pitch at all.

Yet was this "very last" very far off? Since the flower-show, the Premier was displaying feverish activity. He was like a man who is stricken by mortal sickness, but has some work that he must finish before the time comes when he can do no more work, and know no more joy in the work he has done. Bill after bill was introduced embodying his schemes, and the popular praise of him and enthusiasm rose higher and higher at the sight of a minister doing, or at least attempting, all and more than he promised. The Ministry was worked to death; the Governor was apprehensive and uneasy; Capital was, as Kilshaw had said, alarmed; only Sir Robert Perry smiled, as he remarked to the Chief Justice at the Club,

"It can't last. His own men won't swallow all this. Medland must be mad to try it."

"Perhaps," suggested Sir John, "he doesn't mean business. He may only want a strong platform to dissolve on."

"Riding for a fall, eh?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"My experience is," observed Captain Heseltine, looking up from the *Stud Book*, "that chaps who ride for a fall come more unholy crumplers than anybody else."

"I hope you're right," said Sir Robert, with a smile.

And they discussed the matter with much acumen, and would doubtless have arrived at a true conclusion, had they known anything about the

matter. But, as it happened, they were all ignorant of the real reason which dictated Medland's conduct. He had gauged the character of his most uncompromising and powerful enemy to a nicety. He knew that Kilshaw would be loth to make use of Benham, and yet that he would make use of him. He saw that the danger which threatened him had become great and immediate. A stronger hand and a longer purse than Benham's were now against him. The chase had begun. He could not expect much law, and he was riding, not for a fall, but against time. He did not despair of escape, but the chances were against him. He must cover as much ground as he could before the pack was on his heels. So he brought in his bills, made his speeches, fluttered the dovecote of many a prejudice and many an interest, was the idol of the people, and never had a quiet hour.

Besides its more serious effects, the Premier's absorption in public affairs had the result of blinding him to the change that had gradually been coming over his own house. Norburn had always been in and out every hour ; he was in and out still, but now he came straight from the street door to the Premier's room, and went straight back thence to the street door again. The visits to Daisy, which had been wont to precede and follow, perhaps even sometimes to occasion, business conferences, ceased almost entirely ; and the young Minister's brow bore a weight of care that the precarious position of the Cabinet was not alone enough to account for. It would seem as if Daisy must have noticed Norburn's altered ways, although her father did not ; but she made no

reference to them, and appeared to be aware of nothing which called for explanation or remark. Perhaps she missed Norburn's visits less because his place was so often filled by Dick Derosne, who, unable to find, or perhaps scorning, any pretext of business, came with the undisguised object of seeing the Premier's daughter, and not the Premier.

Whatever differences Eleanor Scaife and other studious inquirers may discover between young communities and old, it is safe to say that there are many points of resemblance: one of them is that, in both, folk talk a good deal about their neighbour's affairs. The stream of gossip, which Dick's indiscreet behaviour at Sir John Oakapple's dance had set a-flowing, was not diminished in current by his subsequent conduct. Some people believed that he was merely amusing himself, and were very much or very little shocked according to their temperaments and their views on such matters ; others, with great surprise and regret, were forced to believe him serious, and wondered what he could be thinking of ; a third class took the line sanctioned by the eminent authority of Mr. Tomes, and hailed the possibility of a union of more than private importance. Such a diversity of opinion powerfully promoted the interchange of views, and very soon there were but few people in Kirton society, outside the two households most concerned, who were not watching the progress of the affair.

The circulating eddies of report at last reached Mr. Kilshaw, soon after he had, by his bargain with Benham, been put in possession of the facts that gentleman had to dispose of. Kilshaw knew

Dick Derosne very well, and for a time he remained quiet, expecting to see Dick's zeal slacken and his infatuation cease of their own accord. When the opposite happened, Kilshaw's anger was stirred within him; he was ready to find, and in consequence at once found, a new sin and a fresh cause of offence in the Premier. Without considering that Medland had many things to do besides watching the course of flirtations or the development of passions, he hastily concluded that he had come upon another scheme and detected another manœuvre intended to strengthen the Premier's exposed position. He appreciated the advantage that such an alliance would be to a man threatened with the kind of revelation which menaced Medland; it was clear to his mind that Medland had appreciated it too, and had laid a cunning trap for Dick's innocent feet. It did not suit him to produce yet the public explosion which he destined for his enemy; but he lost no time in determining to checkmate this last ingenious move by some private communication which would put Dick—or perhaps better still, Dick's friends—on guard.

Mr. Dick Derosne perhaps was not unaware that many people in Kirton frowned on him as an unprincipled deceiver, or, at best, a fickle light-o'-love; he would have been much more surprised, and also more displeased, to know that there was even one who thought of him as a deluded innocent, and had determined to rescue him from the snares which were set for his destruction. He did not feel like a deluded innocent. He was not sure how he did feel. Perhaps he also, as well as the man who was preparing to rescue him, had a sub-

ject which did not bear too much or too candid inward discussion ; and he found it easier to stifle any attempt at importunity on the part of his conscience than Kilshaw did. Kilshaw could only appeal to the paramount interests of the public welfare as an excuse for his own doubtful dealing : Dick could and did look into Daisy Medland's eyes and forget that there was any need or occasion for excuse at all. Supposing she were fond of him—and he could not suppose anything else —what did he mean to do ? Many people asked that question, but Dick Derosne himself was not among them. He knew that he would be very sorry to lose her, that she was the chief reason now why he found Kirton a pleasant place of residence, and that he resented very highly any other man venturing to engross her conversation. Beyond that he did not go ; but the state of mind which these feelings indicated was no doubt quite enough to justify Kilshaw in deciding to have recourse to the Governor, and allow his message to Dick to filter through one who had more right than he had to offer counsel.

In a matter like this, to determine was to do. He got on his horse and rode through the Park toward Government House. In the Park he met Captain Heseltine, also mounted and looking very hot. The Captain mopped his face, and waved an accusing arm toward an inhospitable eucalyptus.

"Call that a tree!" he said. "The beastly thing doesn't give a ha'porth of shade."

"It's the best we've got," replied Kilshaw, in ironical apology for his country.

"As a rule, you know," the Captain continued, "coming out for a ride here, except at midnight,

means standing up under a willow and wondering how the deuce you'll get home."

"Well, you're not under a willow now."

"No; I was, but I had to quit. Derosne and Miss Medland turned me out."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"You felt you ought to go?"

"My tact told me so. I say, Kilshaw, what do you make of that?"

"Nothing in it," answered Kilshaw confidently.

Captain Heseltine had but one test of sincerity, and it was a test to which he knew Kilshaw was, as a rule, quite ready to submit. He took out a small note-book from one pocket and a pencil from the other.

"What'll you lay that it doesn't come off?" he asked.

"I won't bet."

"Oh," said the Captain, scornfully implying that he ceased to attach value to Mr. Kilshaw's judgment.

"I won't bet, because I know."

"The deuce you do!" exclaimed Heseltine, promptly repocketing his apparatus.

"And, if you want another reason why I won't bet," continued Kilshaw, who did not like the Captain's air of incredulity, "I'll tell you. I'm going to stop it myself."

"Oh, of course, if *you* object!" said the Captain, with undisguised irony. "I hope, though, that you'll let me have a shot, after Dick."

"You won't want it, if you're a wise man. You wait a bit, my friend," and with a grim nod of his head, Kilshaw rode on.

The Captain looked after him with a meditative stare. Then he glanced at his watch.

"That beggar knows something," said he. "I think I'll go and interrupt friend Richard." And he continued, apostrophising the absent Dick—"To stay out, my boy, may not be easy; but to get out when you're once in, is the deuce!"

CHAPTER XII

AN ABSURD AMBITION

Suave mari magno—Like so many of us who quote these words, Mr. Coxon could not finish the line, but the tag as it stood was enough to express his feelings. If the Cabinet were going to the bottom, he was not to sink with it. If he had one foot in that leaky boat, the other was on firm ground. He had received unmistakable intimations that, if he would tread the path of penitence as Puttock had, the way should be strewn with roses, and the fatted calf duly forthcoming at the end of the journey. He had a right to plume himself on the dexterity which had landed him in such a desirable position, and he was fully awake to the price which that position made him worth. Now a man who commands a great price, thought Mr. Coxon, is a great man. So his meditations—which, in this commercial age, seem hardly open to adverse criticism—ran, as he walked toward Government House, just about the same time as Mr. Kilshaw was also thinking of betaking himself thither. A great man (Mr. Coxon's reflections continued) can aspire to the hand of any lady—more especially when he depends not merely on intellectual ability (which is by no means everything), but is also a man of culture, of breeding, of a University education, and of a very decent income. He forbore to throw his personal attrac-

tions into the scale, but he felt that if he were in other respects a suitable aspirant, no failure could await him on that score. Vanity apart, he could not be blind to the fact that he was in many ways different from most of his compatriots, still more from most of his colleagues.

"In all essentials I am an Englishman, pure and simple," thought he, as he entered the gates of Government House; but, the phrase failing quite to satisfy him, he substituted, as he rang the bell, "An English gentleman."

"Shall we go into the garden?" said Lady Eynesford, after she had bidden him welcome. "I dare say we shall find Miss Scaife there," and, as she spoke, she smiled most graciously.

Coxon followed her, his brow clouded for the first time that day. He was not anxious to find Miss Scaife, and he had begun to notice that Lady Eynesford always suggested Miss Scaife as a resource; her manner almost implied that he must come to see Miss Scaife.

"I can't think where she has got to," exclaimed Lady Eynesford, after a perfunctory search; "but it's too hot to hunt. Sit down here in the veranda. Eleanor has probably concealed herself somewhere to read the last debate. She takes such an interest in all your affairs—the Ministry's, I mean."

"I noticed she was very attentive the other day."

"Oh, at that wretched House! Why don't you ventilate it? It gave poor Alicia quite a headache."

"I hope Miss Derosne is not still suffering?"

"Oh, it's nothing much. I suppose she feels this close weather. It's frightful, isn't it? I won-

der you had the courage to walk up. It's very friendly of you, Mr. Coxon."

"With such an inducement, Lady Eynesford—" Coxon began, in his laboriously polite style.

"I know," laughed his hostess, and her air was so kind and confidential that Coxon was emboldened. He did not understand why people called the Governor's wife cold and "stand-offish"; he always insisted that no one could be more cordial than she had shown herself toward him.

"What do you know?" he asked, with a smile, and an obviously assumed look of surprise.

"You don't suppose I think I'm the inducement —or even the Governor? And we can't find her! Too bad!" and Lady Eynesford shook her head in playful despair.

"But," said Coxon, feeling now quite happy, "isn't the—the inducement—at home?"

"Oh yes, she's somewhere," replied Lady Eynesford, good-naturedly ignoring her visitor's too ready acquiescence in her modest disclaimer.

"I'm afraid I'm a poor politician. I can conceal nothing."

"Your secret is quite safe with me, and no one else has guessed it."

"Not even Miss Scaife?" asked Coxon, with a smile. Eleanor had so often managed a *tête-à-tête* for him, he remembered.

"Oh, I can't tell that—but, you know, we women never guess these things till we're told. It's not correct, Mr. Coxon."

"But you say you guessed it."

"That's quite different. I might guess it—or—or anybody else (though nobody has)—but not Eleanor."

A slight shade of perplexity crossed Coxon's brow. The lady, if kind and reassuring, was also somewhat enigmatical.

"I believe," he said, "Miss Scaife has guessed it."

"Indeed! And is she—pleased?"

"I hope so."

"So do I—for your sake."

"Her approbation would be a factor, would it?"

"Really, Mr. Coxon, I suppose it would!" exclaimed Lady Eynesford in surprise.

"I mean it would be likely to weigh with—with your sister-in-law?"

"With Alicia? Why, what has Alicia got to do with it?"

"You mustn't chaff me, Lady Eynesford. It's too serious," pleaded Coxon, in self-complacent tones.

"What does the man mean?" thought Lady Eynesford. Then a glance at his face somehow brought sudden illumination, and the illumination brought such a shock that Lady Eynesford was startled into vulgar directness of speech.

"Good gracious! Surely it *is* Eleanor you come after?" she exclaimed.

"Miss Scaife! What made you think that? Surely you've seen that it's Miss Derosne who——"

"Mr. Coxon!"

At the tone in which Lady Eynesford seemed to hurl his own name in his teeth, Coxon's rosy illusion vanished. He sat in gloomy silence twisting his hat in his hand and waiting for Lady Eynesford to speak again.

"You astonish me!" she said at last. "I made sure it was Eleanor."

"Why is it astonishing?" he asked. "Surely Miss Derosne's attractions are sufficient to——?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I am indeed. You must believe me, Mr. Coxon. If I had foreseen this I —I would have guarded against it. But now—indeed, I'm so sorry."

Lady Eynesford's sorrowful sympathy failed to touch Coxon's softer feelings.

"What is there to be sorry about?" he demanded, almost roughly.

"Why this—this unfortunate misunderstanding. Of course I thought it was Eleanor; you seemed so suited to one another."

Coxon, ignoring the natural affinity suggested, remarked,

"There's no harm done that I can see, except that I hoped I had you on my side. Perhaps I shall have still."

Sympathy had failed. Lady Eynesford, recognising that, felt she had a duty to perform.

"I dare say I am to blame," she said, "but I never thought of such a thing. Really, Mr. Coxon, you must see that I wasn't likely to think of it," and her tone conveyed an appeal to his calmer reason. She was quite unconscious of giving any reasonable cause of offence.

"Why not?" he asked, the silky smoothness of his manner disappearing in his surprise and wounded dignity.

"The—the—oh, if you don't see, I can't tell you."

"You appear to assume that attentions from me to your sister-in-law were not to be expected."

"You do see that, don't you?"

"While attentions to your governess——"

"Miss Scaife is my friend and worthy of anybody's attentions," interposed Lady Eynesford quickly.

"But all the same, very different from Miss Derosne," sneered Coxon sullenly, putting her thoughts into her mouth with a discrimination that completed her discomfiture.

"I don't think there is any advantage in discussing it further," remarked Lady Eynesford, rising.

"I claim to see Miss Derosne herself. I am not to be put off."

"I will acquaint the Governor and my sister-in-law with your wishes. No doubt my husband will communicate with you. Good-morning, Mr. Coxon," and Lady Eynesford performed her stiffest bow.

"Good-morning, Lady Eynesford," he answered, in no less hostile tones, and very different was the man who slammed the gate of Government House behind him from the bland and confident suitor who had entered it half-an-hour before.

The moment he was gone, Lady Eynesford ran to her husband.

"The next time you take a Governorship," she exclaimed, as she sank into a chair, "you must leave me at home."

"What's the matter now?"

Lady Eynesford, with much indignant comment, related the tale of Coxon's audacity.

"Of course I meant him for Eleanor," she concluded. "Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"But, my dear, he must see Alicia if he wants to. We can't turn him out as if he was a footman! After all, he's got a considerable position here."

"Here!" And the word expressed an opinion as comprehensive as, though far more condensed than, any to be found in Tomes.

"I suppose, Mary, there's no danger of—of Alicia being——?"

"Willie! I couldn't imagine it."

"Well, I'll just tell her, and then I'll write to Coxon and see what to do."

"Do make her understand it's impossible," urged Lady Eynesford.

"We've no reason to suppose she's ever thought of it," the Governor reminded his wife.

"No, of course not," she said. "I shall leave you alone with her, Willie."

Alicia came down at the Governor's summons.

"Well, here's another," said the Governor playfully.

Alicia's conquests had been somewhat numerous —such things were so hard to avoid, she pleaded —and it was not the first time her brother had had to confront her with the slain.

"Another what?"

"Another victim. Mary has been here in a rage because a gentleman is ready to be at your feet. Now who do you think it is?"

"I sha'n't guess. When I guess, I always guess wrong," said Alicia, "and that——"

"Tells tales, doesn't it? Well! it's a great man this time."

A sudden impossible idea ran through her head. Surely it couldn't be—? But nothing we think of very much seems always impossible. It might be! Her air of raillery dropped from her. She sat down, blushing and breathing quickly.

"Who is it, Willie?" she gasped.

"No, you must guess," said the Governor, over his shoulder; he was engaged in lighting a cigar.

"No, no; tell me, tell me," she could not help crying.

At the sound of her voice, he turned quickly and looked curiously at her.

"Why, Al, what's the matter?" he asked uneasily.

Surely she could not care for that fellow? But girls were queer creatures. Lord Eynesford always doubted if they really knew a gentleman from one who was—well, very nearly a gentleman.

Alicia saw his puzzled look and forced a smile.

"Don't tease me. Who is it?"

"No less a man than a Minister."

"A—Willie, who is it?" she asked, and she stretched out a hand in entreaty.

"My dear girl, whatever—? Well, then, it's Coxon."

"Mr. Coxon! Oh!" and a sigh followed, the hand fell to her side, the flush vanished.

She felt a great relief; the strain was over; there was nothing to be faced now, and, as happens at first, peace seemed almost so sweet as to drown the taste of disappointment. Yet she could not have denied that the taste of disappointment was there.

"Oh! how absurd!"

"It's rather amusing," said his Excellency, much relieved in his turn. "You won't chaff Mary—promise."

"What about? No, I promise."

"She thought he was sweet on Eleanor, and rather backed him up—asked him here and all that, you know—and it was you all the time."

Alicia laughed.

"I thought Mary used to leave him a lot to Eleanor."

"That's it."

"But Eleanor always passed him on to me."

"The deuce she did!" laughed Lord Eynesford.

"Don't tell Mary that!"

"Not I! Well, what shall I say? He wants to see you."

"How tiresome!"

"Look here, Al, Mary seems to have given him a bit of her mind; but I must be civil. We can't tell the chap that he's — well, you know. It wouldn't do out here. You don't mind seeing him, do you?"

Alicia said that she would do her duty.

"And shall I be safe in writing and telling him I can say nothing till he has discovered your inclinations?"

"You'll be perfectly safe," said Alicia with decision.

The Governor wrote his letter; it was a very civil letter indeed, and Lord Eynesford felt that it ought in some degree to assuage the wrath which his wife's unseemly surprise had probably raised in Coxon's breast.

"It's all very well," he pondered, "for a man to be civil all round as I am; but his womankind can always give him away."

He closed his note, pushed the writing-pad from him, and, leaning back in his chair, puffed at his cigar. In the moment of reflection, the impression of Alicia's unexplained agitation revived in his memory.

"I don't believe," he mused, "that she expected me to say Coxon. I wonder if there's some one else; it looked like it. But who the deuce could it be here? It can't be Heseltine or Flemyng—

they're not her sort—and there's no one else. Ah! the mail came in this morning, perhaps it's some one at home. That must be it. I like that fellow's impudence. Wonder who the other chap is. Perhaps I was wrong—you can't tell with women, they always manage to get excited about something. I swear there was nothing before I came out, and there's no one here, and——"

"Mr. Kilshaw," announced Jackson.

CHAPTER XIII

OUT OF HARM'S WAY

"I DON'T see what business it is of his," said Dick to his brother the next afternoon. "I call it infernal impertinence."

Lord Eynesford differed.

"Well, I don't," he said. "He did it with great tact, and I'm very much obliged to him."

"I wish people would leave my affairs alone," Dick grumbled.

"Has it gone very far?" asked his brother, ignoring the grumble.

"Depends upon what you call far. There's nothing settled, if that's what you mean."

"I don't know that I've any exact right to interfere, but isn't it about time you made up your mind whether you want it to go any farther?"

"What's the hurry?"

"Because," pursued the Governor, "it seems to me that going on as you're doing means either that you want to marry her, or that you're making a fool of her."

This pointed statement of the case awoke Dick's dormant conscience.

"And a cad of myself, you mean?" he asked.

"Same thing, isn't it?" replied his brother curtly.

"I suppose so," Dick admitted ruefully. "Hang it, I am a fool!"

"I don't imagine you want to do anything a gentleman wouldn't do. Only, if you do, you won't do it from my house—that's all."

"All right, old chap. Don't be so precious down on me. I didn't mean any harm. A fellow gets led on, you know—no, I don't mean by her—by circumstances, you know."

"I grant you she's pretty and pleasant, but she won't have a *sou*, and—well, Medland's a very clever fellow and very distinguished. But——"

"No, I know. They're not our sort."

"Then of course it's no use blinking the fact that there's something wrong. I don't know what, but something."

"Did Kilshaw tell you that?"

"Yes, between ourselves, he did. He wouldn't tell me what, but said he knew what he was talking about, and that I'd better tell you that you and all of us would be very sorry before long if we had anything to do with the Medlands."

"What the deuce does he mean?" asked Dick fretfully.

"Well, you know the sort of gossip that's about. Compare that with what Kilshaw said."

"What gossip?"

"Nonsense! You know well enough. It's impossible to live here without noticing that everybody thinks there's something wrong. I believe Kilshaw knows what it is, and, what's more, that he means to have it out some day. However that may be, rumours of the sort there are about are by themselves enough to stop any wise man."

"Old wives' scandal, I expect."

"Perhaps: perhaps not. Anyhow, I'd rather have no scandal, old wives' or any other, about my wife's family."

"I'm awfully fond of her," said Dick.

"Well, as I said, it's your look-out. I don't

know what Mary'll say, and—you've only got six hundred a year of your own, Dick."

"It seems to me we're in the deuce of a hurry—" began Dick feebly, but his brother interrupted him.

"Come, Dick, do you suppose Kilshaw would have come to me, if he hadn't thought the matter serious? It wasn't a very pleasant interview for him. I expect you've been making the pace pretty warm."

Dick did not venture on a denial. He shifted about uneasily in his seat, and lit a cigarette with elaborate care.

"I don't want to be disagreeable," pursued the Governor, "but both for your sake and mine—not to speak of the girl's—I won't have anything that looks like trifling with her. You must make up your mind; you must go on, or you must drop it."

"How the devil can I drop it? I'm bound to meet her two or three times a week, and I can't cut her."

"You needn't flirt with her."

"Oh, needn't I? That's all you know about it."

The Governor was not offended by this rudeness.

"Then," he said, "if you don't mean to go on——"

"Who said I didn't?"

"Do you?"

Dick was driven into a corner. He asked why life was so ill-arranged, why he was poor, why a man might not look at a girl without proposing to her, why everybody was always so down on him, why people chattered so maliciously, why he was such a miserable devil, and many other questions. His brother relentlessly repeated his "Do you?"

and at last Dick, red in the face, and with every sign of wholesome shame, blurted out,

"How can I marry her? You know I can't—especially after this story of Kilshaw's."

"Very well. Then if you can't marry her, and yet can't help making love to her——"

"I didn't say I made love to her."

"But you do—making love to her, I say, as often as you see her, why, you mustn't see her."

"I'm bound to see her."

"As long as you stay here, yes. But you needn't stay here. We can govern New Lindsey without you, Dick, for a time, anyhow."

This suggestion fell as a new light on Dick Derosne. He waited a moment before answering it with a long-drawn "O-oh!"

"Yes," said the Governor, nodding emphatically. "You might just as well run home and give a look to things: most likely they're going to the deuce."

"But what am I to say to people?"

"Why, that you're going to look after some affairs of mine."

"Will she believe that?"

"She? You said 'people!'"

"Hang it, Willie! I don't like bolting. Besides, it's not half bad out here. Do you think I've—I've behaved like a beast, Willie?"

"It looks like it."

"It's no more than what lots of fellows do."

"Not a bit: less than a great many, thank God, Dick. Come, old chap, do the square thing—the squarest thing you can do now."

"Give me till to-morrow," said Dick, and escaped in a jumble of conflicting feelings—smothered pride in his fascinations, honest reprobation of his reck-

lessness, momentary romantic impulses, recurrent prudential recollections, longings to stay, impatience to get rid of the affair, regrets that he had ever met Daisy Medland, pangs at the notion of not meeting her in the future—a very hotch-pot of crossed and jarring inclinations.

So the Governor did the right, the prudent thing, the only thing, the thing which he could not doubt was wise, and which all reasonable men must have seen to be inevitable. Nevertheless when he met Daisy Medland that afternoon in the Park, he felt much more like a pickpocket than it is comfortable to feel when one is her Majesty's representative: for Dick was with him, and Daisy's eyes, which had lightened in joy at seeing them, clouded with disappointment as they rode past without stopping. Thus, when Dick turned very red and muttered, "I *am* a beast," the Governor moaned inwardly, "So am I."

It is perhaps creditable to Man—and Man, as opposed to Woman, in these days needs a word slipped in for him when it is reasonably possible—that these touches of tenderness fought against the stern resolve that had been taken. But of course they were only proper fruits of penitence, in Dick for himself, in Lord Eynesford for his kind, and it could not be expected that they would reproduce themselves in persons so entirely innocent of actual or vicarious offence as Lady Eynesford and Eleanor Scaife.

"I think," said Lady Eynesford, "that we may congratulate ourselves on a very happy way of getting out of the results of Dick's folly."

"I can't think that Dick said anything really serious," remarked Eleanor.

"So much depends on how people understand things," observed Lady Eynesford.

It was on the tip of Eleanor's tongue to add, "Or wish to understand them," but she recollected that she had really no basis for this malicious insinuation, and made expiation for entertaining it by saying to Alicia,

"You think she's a nice girl, don't you?"

"Very," said Alicia briefly.

"The question is not what she is, so much as who she is," said Lady Eynesford.

"I expect it was all Dick's fault," said Alicia hastily.

"Or that man's," suggested the Governor s wife.

A month ago Alicia would have protested strongly. Now she held her peace: she could not trust herself to defend the Premier. Yet she was full of sympathy for his daughter, and of indignation at the tone in which her sister-in-law referred to him. Also she was indignant with Dick: this conduct of Dick's struck her as an impertinence, and, on behalf of the Medlands, she resented it. They talked, too, as if it were a flirtation with a milliner—dangerous enough to be troublesome, yet too absurd to be really dangerous—discreditable no doubt to Dick, but—she detected the underlying thought—still more discreditable to Daisy Medland. The injustice angered her: it would have angered her at any time; but her anger was forced to lie deeply hidden and secret, and the suppression made it more intense. Dick's flighty fancy caricatured the feeling with which she was struggling: the family attitude toward it faintly foreshadowed the consternation that the lightest hint of her unbanishable dream would raise. And,

worst of all—so it seemed to her—what must Medland think? He must surely scorn them all—this petty pride, their microscopic distinctions of rank, their little devices—all so small, yet all enough to justify the wounding of his daughter's heart. It gave her a sharp, almost unendurable pang to think that he might confound her in his sweeping judgment. Could he after—after what he had seen? He might think she also trifled—that it was in the family—that they all thought it good fun to lead people on and then—draw back in scorn lest the suppliant should so much as touch them.

In the haste of an unreasoning impulse, she went to Medland's house, full of the idea of dissociating herself from what had been done, only dimly conscious of difficulties which, if they existed, she was yet resolute to sweep away. Convention should not stand between, nor cost her a single unkind thought from him.

She asked for Daisy Medland, and was shown into Daisy's little room. She had not long to wait before Daisy came in. Alicia ran to meet her, but dared not open the subject near her heart, for the young girl's bearing was calm and distant. Yet her eyes were red, for it was but two hours since Dick Derosne had flung himself out of that room, and she had been left alone, able at last to cast off the armour of wounded pride and girlish reticence. She had assumed it again to meet her new visitor, and Alicia's impetuous sympathy was frozen by the fear of seeming impertinence.

At last, in despair of finding words, yet set not to go with her errand undone, she stretched out her arms, crying—

"Daisy! Not with me, dear!"

Daisy was not proof against an assault like that. Her wounded pride—for Dick had not been enough of a diplomatist to hide the meaning of his sudden flight—had borne her through her interview with him, and he had gone away doubting if she had really cared for him; it broke down now. She sprang to Alicia's arms, and her comforter seemed to hear her own confession in the young girl's broken and half-stifled words.

"Do come again," said Daisy, and Alicia, who after a long talk had risen to go, promised with a kiss.

The door opened and Medland came in. Alicia started, almost in fright.

"I came—I came—" she began in her agitation, for she assumed that his daughter had told him her story.

"It's very kind of you," he answered, and she, still misunderstanding, went on eagerly—

"It's such a shame! Oh, you don't think I had anything to do with it?"

He looked curiously from one to the other, but said nothing.

Alicia kissed Daisy again and passed by him toward the door: he followed her, and, closing the door, said abruptly,

"What's a shame, Miss Derosne? What's the matter with Daisy?"

"You don't know? Oh, I've no right——"

"No; but tell me, please. Come in here," and he beckoned her into his own study.

"Is she in any trouble?" he asked again. "She won't tell me, you know, for fear of worrying me, so you must."

Somehow Alicia, unable to resist his request,

stammered out the gist of the story; she blamed Dick as severely as he deserved, and shielded Daisy from all suspicion of haste in giving her affection; but the story stood out plain.

"And—and I was so afraid," she ended as she had begun, "that you would think that I had anything to do with it."

"Poor little Daisy!" he said softly. "No; I'm sure you hadn't. Ah, well, I dare say they're right."

He was so calm that she was almost indignant with him.

"Can't you feel for her—you, her father?" she exclaimed.

But a moment later she added, "I didn't mean that. Forgive me! I can't bear to think of the way she has been treated!"

He looked up suddenly and asked,

"Was it only—general objections—or—or anything in particular?"

"What do you mean? I don't know of anything in particular."

"I'm glad. I shouldn't have liked—but you won't understand. Well, you've been very kind."

She would not leave her doubt unsettled. His manner puzzled her.

"Do you know of anything?" she found courage to add.

"'The fathers eat sour grapes,'" he answered, with a bitter smile. "Poor little Daisy!"

"I believe you're hinting at something against yourself."

"Perhaps."

He held out his hand to bid her good-bye, adding,

"You'd better let us alone, Miss Derosne."

"Why should I let you alone? Why mayn't I be her friend?"

He made no direct answer, but said,

"Your news of what has happened—I mean of your friends' attitude—hardly surprises me. You won't suppose I feel it less, because it's my fault—and my poor girl has to suffer for it."

"Your fault?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand," she murmured.

"I hope you never need," he answered earnestly, holding out his hand again.

This time she took it, but, as she did, she looked full in his face and said,

"I will believe nothing against you, not even your own words. Good-bye."

Her voice faltered in the last syllable, and she ran hastily down the stairs.

Medland stood still for some minutes. Then he went in to his daughter and kissed her.

But even that night, in spite of his remorse and sorrow for her grief, his daughter was not alone in his thoughts.

CHAPTER XIV

A FATAL SECESSION

THE sudden departure of Dick Derosne was, according to Kilshaw's view of it, a notable triumph for him over his adversary; but he was not a man to rest content with one victory. He had hardly achieved this success when a chance word from Captain Heseltine started him in a new enterprise, and a hint from Sir John Oakapple confirmed him in his course. He made up his mind not to wait for the slow growth of disaffection in Coxon's mind, but to accelerate the separation of that gentleman from his colleagues. The Captain had been pleased to be much amused at the cessation of Coxon's visits to Government House: Eleanor Scaife's contempt for her supposed admirer was so strong that, when playfully taxed with hardness of heart, she repelled the charge with a vigour that pointed the Captain straight to the real fact. Having apprehended it, he thought himself in no way bound to observe an over-strict reticence as to Coxon's "cheek" and his deserved rebuff.

"In fact," he concluded, "love's at a discount. With Coxon and Dick before one's eyes, it really isn't good enough. All a fellow gets is a dashed good snubbing or his marching orders." And he added, as if addressing an imaginary waiter, "Thank you, I'm not taking it to-day."

His words fell on attentive ears, and the next time Kilshaw had a chance of conversing with

Coxon at the Club, he did not forget what he had learnt from Captain Heseltine.

"How d'you do, Coxon?" said he. "Haven't seen you for a long time. Come and sit here. You weren't at the Governor's party the other night?"

Coxon, gratified at this cordial greeting, joined Mr. Kilshaw. They were alone in the Club luncheon-room, and Coxon was always anxious to hear anything that Sir Robert or his friends had to say. There was always a possibility that it might be very well worth his while to listen.

"I wasn't there," he said. "I don't go when I can help it."

"You used to be so regular," remarked Kilshaw in surprise, or seeming surprise.

Coxon gave a laugh of embarrassed vexation.

"I think I go as often as I'm wanted," he said. "To tell you the truth, Kilshaw, I find my lady a little high and mighty."

"Women can never separate politics and persons," observed Kilshaw, with a tolerant smile. "It's no secret, I suppose, that she's not devoted to your chief."

Coxon looked up quickly. His wounded vanity had long sought for an explanation of the cruel rebuff he had endured.

"Well, I never put it down to that," he said.

"It can't be anything in yourself, can it?" asked Kilshaw, in bland innocence. "No, no; Lady Eynesford's one of us, and there's an end of it—though of course I wouldn't say it openly. Look at the different way she treats the Puttocks since they left you!"

"It's highly improper," observed Coxon.

"I grant it; but she's fond of Perry, and sees

through his glasses. And then you must allow for her natural prejudices. Is Medland the sort of man who would suit her? Candidly now?"

"She needn't identify us all with Medland?"

"Come and have a cigar. Ah, there's Sir John! How are you, Chief Justice? Looks a bit shaky, doesn't he? Come along, Coxon."

So saying, Kilshaw led the way to the smoking-room, and, when the pair were comfortably settled, he recurred to his topic.

"I remember her asking me—in confidence of course, and, all the same, perhaps not very discreetly—what in the world made you go over, and what made you stay over."

"And you said——?"

"I didn't know what to say. I never did understand, and I understand less than ever now."

"Haven't I explained in the House?"

"Oh, in the House! I tell you what it is, Coxon,—and you must stop me if you don't like to hear it—I shall always consider Medland got your support on false pretences."

Coxon did not stop him. He sat and bit his finger-nail while Kilshaw pointed out the discrepancies between what Medland had foreshadowed and what he was doing. He did not consciously exaggerate, but he made as good a case as he could; and he talked to an ear inclined to listen.

"He caught you and Puttock on false pretences—utterly false pretences," Kilshaw ended. "Puttock saw it pretty soon."

"I was too stupid, I suppose?"

"Well, if you like," said Xilshaw, with a laugh. "I suppose when one doesn't appreciate a man's game, one calls him stupid."

"I have no game," said Coxon stiffly.

"My dear fellow, I didn't mean it offensively, I'm sure you haven't, for if ever a man was sacrificing his position and his future on the altar of his convictions, you are."

Mr. Coxon looked noble, and felt uncomfortable.

"In a month or two," continued Kilshaw, laying his hand on his neighbour's arm and speaking impressively, "Medland will be not only out of office, but a discredited man."

"Why?" asked the other uneasily, for Kilshaw's words implied some hidden knowledge: without that he could not have ventured on such a prophecy to a colleague of the Premier's.

"Never mind why. You know you can't last, and time will show the rest. He'll go—and all who stick to him. Well, I've said too much. Have you heard the news? But of course you have, Ministers hear everything."

"What news?"

"The Chief Justice thinks of resigning: he told me himself that he had spoken to Medland about it, and Medland had asked him to wait a little."

"What for?"

"Oh, Medland wants to get hold of a good man from England, I understood. He thinks nobody here equal to it."

"Complimentary to my profession out here."

"I know. I wonder at Medland: he's generally so strong on 'Lindsey for the Lindseians,' as he once said. In this matter he and Perry seem to have changed places."

"Really? Then Sir Robert——?"

"Yes, he's quite anxious to have one of ourselves. I must say I heartily agree, and of course

it could easily be managed, if Medland liked. Perry would do it in a minute. I really don't see why the best berth in the colony is to be handed over to some hungry failure from London. But no doubt you'll agree with Medland."

"Oh, I don't know," said Coxon. "It seems to me rather a point where the Bar here ought to assert itself."

"I know, if we were in and had a fit man, we should hear nothing more of an importation. The best man in the colony would be glad to have it: of course there's not the power a Minister has, or the interest of active political life, but it's well paid, very dignified, and, above all, permanent."

Now neither Kilshaw nor Coxon were dull men, and by this time they very well understood one another. They knew what they meant just as well as though they had been indecent enough to say it. "Help us to turn out Medland, and you shall be Chief Justice," said Kilshaw, in the name of Sir Robert Perry,—"Chief Justice, and once more a *persona grata* at Government House." Chief Justice! Soon, perhaps, Sir Alfred! Would not that soften the Eynesford heart? Mr. Coxon honestly thought it would. The subtleties of English rank are not to be apprehended by a mere four years' visit to our shores.

"We expect Sir John to go on for a couple of months or so," Kilshaw continued. "I don't think he'll stay longer."

"Perhaps we shall be out by then."

"Not as things stand, I'm afraid," and Kilshaw shook his head. "Now if we could get you, Medland would be out in three weeks."

"I must do what I think right."

"My dear Coxon! Of course!"

Mr. Kilshaw returned to his office well pleased. A careful computation showed that Medland was supported now by a steady majority of not more than eight: Coxon's defection could not fail to leave him in a minority; for, although Coxon was a young man, and, as yet, of no great independent weight in politics, he had acquired a factitious importance, partly from the prestige of a successful University career in England, still more from the fact that he was the only remaining member of the Ministry to whom moderate men and vested interests could look with any confidence. Shorn of him, as it had been shorn of Puttock, the Government would stand revealed as the organ and expression of the Labour Party and nothing else, and Perry and Kilshaw doubted not that six or eight members of the House would be found to enter the "cave," if Coxon showed them the way. Then,— "Why then," said Mr. Kilshaw to his conscience, "we need not use that brute Benham at all! There's a nice sop! Lie down like a good dog, and stop barking!"

Indeed, had it been quite certain that Benham's aid would not still prove needful, Kilshaw would have been very glad to be rid of him. Complete leisure and full pockets appeared not to be, in his case, a favourable soil for the growth of virtue. No doubt Mr. Benham's position was in some respects a hard one. All men who have money in plenty and nothing to do claim from the wise a lenient judgment, and, besides these disadvantages, Benham laboured under the possession of a secret —a secret of mighty power. What wonder if he spent much of his day in eating-houses and drink-

ing-houses, obscurely hinting to admiring boon companions of the thing he could do an he would? Then, having drunk his fill, he would swagger, sometimes not over-steadily, out to the Park, and amuse himself by scowling at the Premier, or smiling a smile of hidden meaning at Daisy Medland, as they drove by. Also, he occasionally got into trouble: one zealous partisan of the Premier's rewarded an insinuation with a black eye, and Mr. Kilshaw's own servant, finding his master's pensioner besieging the house in a state of drink-begotten noisiness, kicked him down the street—an excess of zeal that cost Mr. Kilshaw a cheque next day. The danger was, however, of a worse thing than these. Kilshaw, suffering only what he doubtless deserved to suffer, went on thorns of fear lest some day Benham should not only explode his bomb prematurely, but publish to the world at whose charges and under whose auspices the engineer was carrying out his task. And when Mr. Kilshaw contemplated this possibility, he found it hopeless to deny that there was pitch on his fingers. Publicity makes such a difference in men's judgments of themselves.

In this way things hung on for a week or so, and then, one afternoon, the Chief Justice rushed into the Club in a state of some excitement. Spying Perry and Kilshaw, he hastened to them.

"You have heard?" he cried.

"What?" asked Sir Robert, wiping his glasses and smiling quietly.

"No? I believe I'm the first. Coxon told me himself: he came into my room when I rose today. He asked Medland to accept his resignation."

Kilshaw sprang to his feet.

"What on?" asked Sir Robert.

"The Accident-Liability Clause in the Factory Act."

"A very good ground," commented the ex-Premier. "Very cleverly chosen."

"What does Medland say?" asked Kilshaw eagerly. "Will he give way, or will he let him go?"

"I think the man's mad," said the Chief Justice. "He won't budge an inch. So Coxon goes—and he says a dozen will go with him."

Then Mr. Kilshaw's feelings overcame him.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "By heaven, we've got him now! We shall beat him on the Clause! Perry, you'll be back in a week!"

"It looks like it," said Sir Robert, "but one never knows."

"Puttock's solid, and now Coxon! Perry, we shall beat him by anything from six to ten! I sha'n't die a pauper yet!"

Sir John bustled on, anxious to anticipate in other quarters the coming newsvendor, and Sir Robert turned to his lieutenant.

"I suppose he must have his price," he remarked, with deep regret evident in his tone.

"I can't look him in the face if he doesn't," answered Kilshaw. "By Jove, Perry, he's earned it."

"Oh yes, so did Iscariot," said Sir Robert. "But it wasn't a Judgeship."

"You won't go back on it, Perry?"

Sir Robert spread out his thin white hands before him, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"A bargain's a bargain, I suppose," said he, "even if it happens to be rather an iniquitous one,"

and having enunciated this principle, on which he had often insisted in public, he took up a volume of poetry.

Not so Mr. Kilshaw. He flitted from friend to friend, telling the good news and exchanging congratulations. The evening papers announced the resignation and its impending acceptance, and further stated that the rumour was that the Premier had convened a meeting of his remaining followers to consider their position.

"They may consider all night," said Mr. Kilshaw, "but they can't change a minority into a majority," and he hailed a cab to take him home.

Suddenly he was touched on the shoulder. Turning, he found Benham beside him.

"Good news, eh?" said that worthy. "Shake hands on it, Mr. Kilshaw."

Kilshaw swallowed his first-formed words, and, after a moment's hesitation, put out his hand. Benham shook it warmly, saying,

"I guess we'll blow him up between us. There's my fist on it. See you soon," and, with a lurching step and a leer over his shoulder, he walked on.

Kilshaw looked at his hand.

"Thank God I had my glove on," he said, and got into his cab.

Certainly there is no rose without a thorn.

When the Governor announced to his household that he had accepted Coxon's resignation, and that it was understood that the retiring Minister would henceforward act with Sir Robert Perry, the news was variously received. Captain Heseltine's observation was brief, but comprehensive.

"Rats!" said he.

Alicia nodded to him with a smile. Eleanor

Scaife began to argue the pros and cons of the Accident-Liability Clause, as to which, she considered, there might fairly be a difference of opinion. Lady Eynesford cut across the inchoate disquisition by remarking,

"I have never disliked Mr. Coxon, but he doesn't quite know his place," and nothing that anybody could say made her see any absurdity in this remark.

CHAPTER XV

AN ATTEMPT AT TERRORISM

ALL the world was driving, riding, or walking in the great avenue of the Park. The Governor had just gone by on horseback, accompanied by his sister and his A.D.C.'s, and Lady Eynesford's carriage was drawn up by the pathway. The air was full of gossip and rumours, for although it was an "off-day" at the House, and nothing important was expected to happen there before the following Monday, there had been that morning a meeting of the Premier's principal adherents, and every one knew or professed to know the decision arrived at. One said resignation, another dissolution, a third coalition, a fourth submission, and the variety of report only increased the confidence with which each man backed his opinion. Sir Robert Perry alone knew nothing, had heard nothing, and would guess nothing—by which adroit attitude he doubled his reputation for omniscience. And Mr. Kilshaw alone cared nothing: the Ministry was "cornered," he said, and that was enough for him. Eleanor Scaife was insatiable for information, or, failing that, conjecture, and she eagerly questioned the throng of men who came and went, paying their respects to the Governor's wife, and lingering to say a few words on the situation. Sir John Oakapple fixed himself permanently by the steps of the carriage, and played the part of a good-humoured though cynical chorus to the shifting drama.

Presently, a little way off, Mr. Coxon made his

appearance, showing in his manner a pleased consciousness of his importance. They all wanted a word with him, and laid traps to catch a hint of his future action; he had explained his motives and refused to explain his intentions half-a-dozen times at least. If this flattering prominence could last, he must think twice before he accepted even the most dignified of shelves; but his cool head told him it would not, and he was glad to remember the provision he had made for a rainy day. Meanwhile he basked in the sun of notoriety, and played his *rôle* of the man of principle.

"Ah," exclaimed Eleanor, "here comes the hero of the hour, the maker and unmaker of Ministries."

"As the weather-cock makes and unmakes the wind," said Sir John, with a smile.

"What? Mr. Coxon?" said Lady Eynesford, and, pleased to have an opportunity of renewing her politeness without revoking her edict, she made the late Minister a very gracious bow.

Coxon's face lit up as he returned the salutation. Had his reward come already? He had been right then; it was not toward him as himself, but toward the Medlandite that Lady Eynesford had displayed her arrogance and scorn. Smothering his recurrent misgivings, and ignoring the weakness of his theory, he laid the balm to his sore and obliterated all traces of wounded dignity from his response to Lady Eynesford's advance.

"My husband tells me," she said, "that I must leave my opinion of your exploits unspoken, Mr. Coxon. Why do you laugh, Sir John?"

"At a wife's obedience, Lady Eynesford."

"Then," said Coxon, "I shall indulge myself by imagining that I have your approbation."

"And what is going to happen?" asked Eleanor for about the twentieth time that day.

Coxon smiled and shook his head.

"They all do that," observed Sir John. "Come, Coxon, admit you don't know."

"We'd better suppose that it's as the Chief Justice says," answered Coxon, whose smile still hinted wilful reticence.

"But think how uninteresting it makes you!" protested Eleanor.

"Oh, I don't agree," said Lady Eynesford. "I am studying every line of Mr. Coxon's face, and trying to find out for myself."

"I told you," he said in a lower voice, and under cover of a joke Sir John was retailing to Eleanor, "that I was a bad hand at concealment."

"I hope you have not remembered all I said then as well as all you said? I was so surprised and—and upset. Was I very rude?"

The implied apology disarmed Coxon of his last resentment.

"I was afraid," he said, "it meant an end to our acquain——"

"Our friendship," interposed the lady with swift graciousness. "Oh, then, I was much more disagreeable than I meant to be."

"It didn't mean that?"

"You don't ask seriously? Now do tell me—what about the Ministry?"

He sank his voice as he answered,

"They can't possibly last a week."

"You are sure?"

"Certain, Lady Eynesford. They'll be beaten on Monday."

Lady Eynesford, with a significant smile, beat one gloved hand softly against the other.

"That can't be seen outside the carriage, can it? You mustn't tell of me! And we owe it all to you, Mr. Coxon!" And for the moment Lady Eynesford's heart really warmed to the man who had relieved her of the Medlands. "When are you coming to see us?" she went on. "Or is it wrong for you to come now? Politically wrong, I mean."

"I was afraid it might be wrong otherwise," Coxon suggested.

"Not unless you feel it so, I'm sure."

"Perhaps Miss Derosne—" he began, but Lady Eynesford was on the alert.

"Her friendly feelings toward you have undergone no change, and if you can forget— Ah, here are Alicia and my husband!" and Lady Eynesford, feeling the arrival excellently well timed, broke off the *tête-à-tête* before the protests she feared could form themselves on Coxon's lips.

It might be that Alicia's feelings had undergone no change, but, if so, Coxon was forced to recognise that he could never have enjoyed a large share of her favour, for she acknowledged his presence with the minimum of civility, and, when he addressed her directly, replied with the coldness of pronounced displeasure.

Lady Eynesford, perceiving that graciousness on her part was perfectly safe, redoubled her efforts to soothe the despised admirer. She had liked him well enough, he had served her against her enemies, and she was ready and eager to do all she could to soften the blow, provided always that she could rely on the blow being struck. Now, from

Alicia's manner it was plain that the blow had fallen from an unfaltering hand.

Suddenly the Chief Justice said,

"Ah, it's settled one way or the other. Here come Medland and Miss Daisy."

In the distance the Premier appeared, walking by the pony his daughter rode. Lady Eynesford turned to her husband and whispered appealingly,

"Need they come here, Willie?"

He shook his head in indulgent disapproval, and said to Alicia,

"Come, Al, we'll go and speak to them," and before Lady Eynesford could declare Alicia's company unnecessary, the pair had turned their horses' heads and were on the way to join the Medlands.

Lady Eynesford's eyes followed them. She saw the meeting, and presently she noticed the Governor ride on with Daisy Medland, while Alicia walked her horse and kept pace with the Premier. They passed by her on the other side of the broad avenue, Medland acknowledging her salutation but not crossing to speak to her. She saw Alicia's heightened colour and the eager interest with which she bent down to catch Medland's words. Medland spoke quickly and earnestly. Once he laughed, and Alicia's gay peal struck on her sister-in-law's ear. Lady Eynesford, as she looked after them, heard Sir John say to Eleanor,

"He's a wonderful man, with a very extraordinary attraction about him. Everybody feels it who comes into personal relations with him. I know I do. And Perry has remarked the same thing to me. Lady Perry, you know, like all women, openly admires him. It's very amusing to see Sir Robert's face when she praises him."

Lady Eynesford did not notice Eleanor's reply. A frown gathered on her brow as she still gazed after the two figures. What did they mean by talking about the man's attractiveness? He had never attracted her: and Alicia— It suddenly struck her that Alicia's former championship of the Premier had changed to a complete silence, and she was vaguely disturbed by the idea of this unnatural reticence. Alicia, she knew, was friendly, too friendly, with the girl; that did not so much matter now that Dick was safe on board ship. But if the friendship were not only for the daughter!

She roused herself from her reverie and turned again to Coxon. She found him looking at her closely, with a bitter smile on his lips. She had not noticed that Eleanor had got out and accepted Sir John's escort for a stroll. She and Coxon were alone.

"Miss Derosne's displeasure with me," he said, "is fully explained, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

For reply he pointed with his cane.

"She favours the Ministry," he said. "Your views are not hers, Lady Eynesford."

"Oh, she knows nothing about politics."

"Perhaps it isn't all politics," he answered, with a boldly undisguised significance.

Lady Eynesford turned quickly on him, a haughty rebuke on her lips, but he did not quail. He smiled his bitter smile again, and she turned away with her words unspoken.

A silence followed. Coxon was wondering if his hint had gone too far. Lady Eynesford wondered how far he had meant it to carry. The idea of

danger there was new and strange, and perhaps absurd, but infinitely disagreeable and disquieting.

"Well, good-bye, Lady Eynesford," he began.

"No, don't go," she answered. But before she could say more, there was a sudden stir in the footpath, voices broke out in eager talk, groups formed, and men ran from one to the other. Women's high voices asked for the news, and men's deep tones declared it in answer. Coxon turned eagerly to look, and as he did so, Kilshaw's carriage dashed up. Kilshaw sat inside, with the evening paper in his hand. He hurriedly greeted Lady Eynesford, and went on—

"Pray excuse me, but have you seen Sir Robert Perry? I am most anxious to find him."

"He's there on the path," answered Coxon, and Kilshaw leapt to the ground.

"Run and listen, and come and tell me," cried Lady Eynesford, and Coxon, hastening off, overtook Kilshaw just as the latter came upon Sir Robert Perry.

The news soon spread. The Premier, conscious of his danger, had determined on a demonstration of his power. On the Sunday before that eventful, much-discussed Monday, when the critical clause was to come before the Legislative Assembly, he and his followers had decided to convene mass-meetings throughout the country, in every constituency whose member was a waverer, or suspected of being one of "Coxon's rats," as somebody — possibly Captain Heseltine — had nicknamed them. This was bad, Kilshaw declared. But far worse remained: in the capital itself, in that very Park in which they were, there was to be an immense meeting: the Premier himself would speak,

and the thousands who listened were to threaten the recreant Legislature with vengeance if it threw out the people's Minister.

"It's nothing more or less than an attempt to terrorise us," declared Sir Robert, in calm and deliberate tones. "It's a most unconstitutional and dangerous thing."

And Kilshaw endorsed his chief's views in less measured tones.

"If there's bloodshed, on his head be it! If he appeals to force, by Jove, he shall have it!"

Amid all this ferment the Premier walked by, half hidden by Alicia Derosne's horse.

"What is the excitement?" she exclaimed.

"My last shot," he answered, smiling. "Good-bye. Go and hear me abused."

Lady Eynesford would have been none the happier for knowing that Alicia thought, and Medland found, a smile answer enough.

CHAPTER XVI

A LEAKY VESSEL

It was the afternoon of the next day—the Friday—and Kirton was in some stir of bustle and excitement. Groups of working-men gathered and discussed the coming meeting; carts had already passed by on their way to the Park carrying materials for platforms, and had been cheered by some of the more eager spirits. The tradesmen were divided in feeling, some foreseeing a brisk demand for things to eat and drink in the next few days, the more timid not denying this but doubting whether payment might not be dispensed with, and nervously enlarging on the cost of plate glass. Organisers ran busily to and fro, displaying already, some of them, rosettes of office, and all of them as much hurry as though the great event were fixed for a short hour ahead. Norburn was about the streets, looking more cheerful than he had done for a long while—the scent of battle was in his nostrils—and enjoying the luxury of prevailing on his friends not to hiss Mr. Puttock when that worthy stepped across from his warehouse to the Club about five o'clock.

Inside the Club, also, excitement was not lacking. The Houses of Parliament were deserted for this more central spot, and many members anxiously discussed their principles and their prospects, and the relation between the two. Medland's followers were not there in much force, being for the

most part employed elsewhere, and indeed at no time much given to club-life, or suited for it, but there were many of Perry's, and still more of those who had followed Puttock, or were reported to be about to follow Coxon, and among them the members for several divisions in and near Kirton. These last, feeling that all the stir was largely for their benefit and on their account, were in a fluster of self-consciousness and apprehension, and very loud in their condemnation of the Premier's unscrupulous tactics.

"Surely the Governor can't approve of this sort of thing," said one.

"Is it *legal*, Sir John?" asked another of the Chief Justice, who had come in from court and was taking a cup of tea.

"It's mere bullying," exclaimed a third, catching Kilshaw's sympathetic eye.

"We'll not be bullied," answered that gentleman. "Every right-feeling and respectable man is with us, from the Governor——"

"The Governor? How do you know?" burst from half-a-dozen mouths.

"I do know. He's furious with Medland, partly for doing the thing at all, partly for not telling him sooner. He thinks Medland took advantage of his civility yesterday and paraded him in the Park as on his side, while all the time he never said a word about this move of his."

"Ah!" said everybody, and Coxon, who knew nothing about the matter, endorsed Kilshaw's account with a significant nod.

"It's a gambler's last throw," declared Puttock. "Honestly, I'm ashamed to have been so long in finding out his real character."

Some one here weakly defended the Premier.

"After all," he said, "there's nothing wrong in a public meeting, and perhaps that's all——"

Puttock overbore him with a solemnly emphasised reiteration——

"A discredited gambler's last throw."

"It's Jimmy Medland's last throw, anyhow," added Kilshaw. "I'll see to that."

"Look! There he is!" called a man in the bow-window, and the company crowded round to look.

Medland was walking down the street side by side with a short, thick-set man, whose close-cut, stiff, black hair, bright black eyes, and bristly chin-tip gave him a foreign look. The man seemed to be giving explanations or detailing arrangements, and Medland from time to time nodded assent.

"Who's that with him?" asked Puttock.

The desired information came from a young fellow in the Government service.

"I know him," he said, "because he applied to me for a certificate of naturalisation a month or two ago. François Gaspard he calls himself—heaven knows if it's his real name. He's a Frenchman, anyhow, and, I rather fancy, not a voluntary exile."

"Ah!" exclaimed Kilshaw, "what makes you think that?"

"Oh, I had a little talk with him, and he said he'd been kept too long out of his country to care about going back now, although the door had been opened at last."

"An amnesty, you suppose?"

"I thought so. And I happen to know he's very active among the political clubs here."

"Oh, that explains Medland being with him,"

said Kilshaw. "Some Communist or Socialist probably."

Attention being thus directed to the stranger, one or two of the Kirton politicians present recollected having encountered him in the course of their canvassings, and bore witness to the influence which he wielded among the extreme section of the labouring men. His presence with Medland was considered to increase appreciably the threatening aspect of affairs.

"One criminal in his Cabinet," said Mr. Kilshaw, with scornful reference to Norburn, "and arm-in-arm down the street with another. We're getting on, aren't we, Chief Justice?"

"I have seen too many criminals," answered Sir John, "to think badly of a man merely because he commits an offence against the law." The Chief Justice did not intend to be drawn into any exhibition of partisanship.

The occupants of the Club window continued to watch the Premier until he parted from his companion with a shake of the hand, and, as it seemed, a last emphatic word, and turned to Norburn, who was claiming his attention.

Now the last emphatic word whose unknown purport stirred much curiosity in the Club, carried a pang of disappointment to François Gaspard, for it was "Mind, no sticks," and it swept away François's rapturous imaginings of the thousands of Kirton armed with a forest of sturdy cudgels, wherewith to terrify the *bourgeoisie*. Still, François had made up his mind to trust Jimmy Medland, in spite of sundry shortcomings of faith and practice, and having sworn by his *foi*—which, to tell the truth, was an unsubstantial sanction—to obey

his leader, he loyally, though regretfully, promised that there should be no sticks; for, "If sticks appear," the Premier had said, "I shall not appear, that's all, Mr. Gaspard."

The English illogicality which hung obstinately round even such gifted men as Medland and *le jeune* Norburn, so oppressed François—who could not see why, if you might hint at cudgels in the background, you should not use them—that, on his way to his next committee, he turned into a tavern to refresh his spirit. The room was fairly full, and he found, the centre of an interested group, an acquaintance of his, Mr. Benham. François imported no personal rancour into his politics; he hated whole classes with a deadly enmity, but he was ready to talk to or drink or gossip with any of the individuals composing them, without prejudice of course to his right, or rather duty, of obliterating them in their corporate capacity at the earliest opportunity, or even removing them one by one, did his insatiable principles demand the sacrifice. He had met Benham several times, since the latter had taken to frequenting music-halls and drinking-shops, and had enjoyed some argument with him, in which the loss of temper had been entirely on Benham's side. François gave his order, sat down, lit his cigarette, and listened to his friend's denunciation of the Government and its works.

Presently the company, having drunk as much as it wanted or could pay for, or being weary of Benham's philippic, went its various ways, and François was left alone with his opponent. Benham had been consuming more small glasses of cognac than were good for him, and had reached the boastful and confidential stage of intoxication.

He ranged up beside François, besought that unbending though polite man to eschew his evil ways, and hinted openly at the folly of those who pinned their faith on the Premier.

"He does not go all my way," responded François, with a smile and a shrug, "but he goes part. Well, we will go that part together."

Benham leant over him and whispered huskily, bringing his fist down on the counter—

"I can crush him, and I will."

"My dear friend!" murmured François. "See! Do not drink any more. It destroys the generally excellent balance of your mind."

"Ah, you may laugh, but I can do it."

François used the permission; he laughed gaily and freely.

"All your party tries," said he, "and it does not do it. And you will do it alone! Ah, *par exemple!*"

His cool scepticism unloosed Benham's tongue, when an eager curiosity might have revived his prudence and set a seal on his lips. He had chafed at being thought a nobody so long: Kilshaw's injunctions against gossip had been so hard to follow: he could not resist trying what startling effect a hint would have.

"I know enough to ruin him," he whispered, and something in his look or tone convinced François that he believed what he said. "Yes, and I'm going to do it. Others have got the money and'll back me—I've got the information. We shall ruin him, Mr. G-Gaspard, we shall drive him from the country, and where'll your precious party, and your precious schemes, and your precious meetings be then? Tell me that!"

"He would be a great loss," remarked François calmly. "But, come, what is this great thing that is to ruin him?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Eh, my friend, immensely!" smiled François, who spoke the mere truth, for all he took care to speak it very carelessly.

"I'll tell you this much, it's not a political matter—it's a private matter, and a public man's private character is everything."

"You think so? To me, it is not a great thing, so that he will do what I wish."

Benham smiled knowingly, as he answered, with a wink,

"At any rate, most people think so. And I'll tell you what, Gaspard, I hate that fellow. He's wronged me—me, I tell you, and, by God, he shall smart for it!"

"Oh, if it is a personal quarrel," murmured François, with the air of not desiring to intrude in a matter which concerned two gentlemen alone.

"Every one'll know it in a few days," said Benham, "and then Mr. Medland's bust up, and all the lot of you with him. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, friend Gaspard."

"And at present no one knows it but you?"

If Benham had answered truly he would have been wise, but his vaunting mind persuaded him not to diminish his importance by confessing that he shared his secret with any one. After all, it was all his secret, though Kilshaw had bought it.

"Not a soul alive!" he answered, rising to go.

"Ah, then yours is a life valuable to your party. Wrap up, my friend, wrap up. It is chilly outside."

He buttoned Benham's coat for him with friendly solicitude, besought him not to get run over—a caution rather necessary—and started him on his way. Then he sat down again, ordered a cup of coffee, and smoked another cigarette.

"Decidedly," he said at last, "it would be a thousand pities if a creature like that were allowed to do any harm to the good Medland. Surely it would not be right to suffer that?"

And he sat thinking, and becoming more and more sure whither the finger of duty pointed, until some comrades came and carried him off to take the chair at an organising committee, where he made a very temperate speech, and announced that he should regard every one who carried a stick on Sunday as intentionally guilty of the grossest incivility to him, François Gaspard, and as an enemy to the cause to boot.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MAN

In arriving at the bold decision which had caused so much anger and alarm to his enemies, and some searchings of heart among many who still ranked themselves as his friends, the Premier had been moved by more than one motive. The sinister design of overawing the Legislature by the fear of physical force and armed attack did not form part of his intentions, but he did intend and desire what, to a man trained in the traditions of Sir Robert's school, was hardly less unconstitutional and wrong. Through the machinery of his great gatherings, it was to be plainly intimated to the members what course their constituents and masters willed them to follow. He proposed to take every precaution against riot—and the necessary measures fell within the sphere of his own official duties as Chief Secretary ; but he was willing and eager that every form of suasion and threat, short of the cudgels for which François Gaspard pined, should be brought to bear on his renegade followers. And, in the second place, it was a vital object to him to probe as deep as he could into the secrets of the popular mind. In six months the life of the Legislative Assembly would expire by effluxion of time : at any moment before he had a right to demand a dissolution, provided that he could convince the Governor of the probability of his coming back with a majority ; thus, if the meetings could not avert defeat, they would, he hoped, teach him what course to follow

in face of it. Lastly, he anticipated a renewal of energy and confidence in his own followers as the result of an outward manifestation of the support which he believed the masses of the electors accorded to his policy. His plans ignored the mine which was always beneath his feet. He had not forgotten it: it was constantly present to his mind with its menace of sudden explosion, but he was driven to diregard a chance that was entirely incalculable. He could not discern the mind of Benham, or of the man who pulled the strings to which Benham danced, accurately enough to forecast when the moment of attack would come. He felt sure that nothing short of the surrender and renunciation of all his policy could avert the blow—perhaps not even that would serve; if so, the blow must fall, when and where it would; for, whatever its effect on his position or his party, it would not leave him so powerless or so humbled in his own eyes as a voluntary submission to the terms his enemies chose to dictate.

The alternative of surrender would never have crossed his mind, had he been able to think only of the political side of the matter. But there was another, on which Benham's threats played with equal force. The episode of Dick Derosne's banishment had opened his eyes more fully to what the revelation might mean to his daughter; for, when he thought over the abrupt end that had been put to that romance, he could hardly fail to connect it with Benham or with Kilshaw. He shrank from the exposure to Daisy which he would have to undergo, and from the pain which he was doomed to inflict on her. Long years, no less than his own mode of thought, had veiled from him the

character of what he would have to avow; the thing took on a new aspect when he forced himself to hear it as it would strike a daughter's ears. And, by this time, he was conscious—he could no longer affect to himself to be unconscious—that the blow which was to fall on Daisy would strike another with equal, perhaps greater, severity. He might remind himself, as he did over and over again, of the improbability, nay, the absurdity of what had happened; he might tell himself that he was no longer young, that time had robbed him of anything that could catch a girl's fancy, that the gulf of birth, associations, and surroundings yawned wide between. His own experience and insight into temperament rose up and contradicted him, and Alicia Derosne's face drove the truth into his mind. Seeking for a hero, she had strangely, almost comically, he thought, made one of him. Hero-worship, shutting out all criticism, had led her on till she made of him, a man whose life bore no close scrutiny, a battered politician, half visionary, half demagogue (for he did not spare himself in his thoughts)—till she had made of him an ideal statesman and a man worthy of all she had to give. A swift and gentle disenchantment was the best that could be wished for her: so he told himself, but he did not wish it. Time had not altogether changed him, and a woman's smile was to him still a force in his life, as much as it had been, or almost, when it led the boy of twenty-three to do all those rash and wrong things long ago. He could not bear to shut the door: dreaming of impossible transformations of obstinate facts, he drifted on, excusing himself for doing nothing by telling himself that there was nothing he could do.

Mr. Kilshaw's information as to the Governor's attitude had not been entirely incorrect, but, after an interview with the Premier, in which the latter explained his action, Lord Eynesford did not feel that more was required than a temperately expressed surprise and a hinted disapproval of the course adopted. He declined his wife's invitation to regard the matter in the most serious light, or to attribute any heinous offence to the Premier, contenting himself with remarking that Medland had a more powerful motive to maintain order than any one else; he also ventured to suggest that the best way of considering the question was not through a mist of prejudice against the Premier and all his belongings.

"Whatever you may do, Mary," he said, "I must keep the private and public sides separate."

"That's just what you don't do," retorted his wife—let it be added that they were alone. "The man has got round you as he gets round everybody."

"You, at least, seem safe so far," laughed the Governor. "Aren't you content with your triumph in the matter of Dick?"

"I heard from him to-day. He wants to come back."

Dick had obtained leave to visit Australia, instead of going home, and was therefore within comparatively easy distance of New Lindsey.

"Oh, I think we'll wait a bit."

"He seems to be having a splendid time, but he says he's lonely without us all."

"How touching!" remarked Lord Eynesford sceptically.

"Willie, be just to him. I was thinking how

nice it would be if Alicia could join him for a little while. She's looking pale and wants a change."

"Does she want to go?"

"Well, I don't know."

"Haven't you asked her?"

"No, dear."

Lord Eynesford knew his wife's way. He rose and stood with his back to the fireplace.

"You'll be sending me away next, Mary," he remarked. "What's wrong with Alicia? She doesn't show signs of relenting about your friend Coxon, does she? If so, she shall go by the next boat, if I have to exert the prerogative."

"Mr. Coxon? Oh, dear, no! Poor man! There's no danger from him."

"What's in the wind then?"

"She's too intimate with these Medlands."

"My dear Mary! Forgive me, but you're in danger of becoming a monomaniac. The Medlands are not lepers."

Lady Eynesford shut her lips close and made no answer.

"What harm can they do her?" pursued the Governor. "Daisy's a nice girl, and Medland—well, the worst he can do is to make her a Radical, and it doesn't matter two straws what she is."

Lady Eynesford's foot tapped on the floor.

"I suppose you'll laugh at me," she said. "Indeed it's absurd enough to make any one laugh, but, Willie, I'm not quite sure that Alicia isn't too much——"

The sentence was cut short by the entrance of Alicia herself.

"Ah! Al!" cried the Governor. "Come here. Would you like to join Dick in Australia?"

Alicia started.

"He says he's lonely, and I thought it would be such a nice trip for you," added Lady Eynesford.

"Dick lonely! What nonsense! It only means he wants to come back, Mary."

Dick's pathos was evidently a broken reed. Lady Eynesford let it go, and said,

"Anyhow, you might take advantage of his being there to see Australia."

"I don't want to see Australia," answered Alicia. "I much prefer New Lindsey."

"You don't jump at Mary's proposal?"

"I utterly decline," laughed Alicia, and, taking the book she had come in search of, she went out.

"You see. She won't go," remarked Lady Eynesford.

"I never thought she would. What were you going to say when she came in?"

Lady Eynesford rose and stood by her husband.

"Willie," she said, "what is it about the Medlands? I'm tired of not knowing whether there is anything or whether there isn't."

"I don't know, my dear. There's some gossip, I believe," said Lord Eynesford discreetly.

"Do you know what Mrs. Puttock said to Eleanor? Eleanor ought to have told me at once, but she only did last night. Eleanor asked something about his wife, and Mrs. Puttock said, 'For my part, I don't believe he ever had a wife.'" Lady Eynesford repeated the all-important sentence with scrupulous accuracy.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Governor. "That was what—" He checked himself before Kilshaw's name could leave his lips.

"Yes? Now, Willie, if that's true or—or anything like it, you know, is it right for Alicia to be constantly with Daisy Medland and—and in and out of the house, you know?"

The Governor looked grave. The thing was tangible enough now, and demanded to be dealt with more urgently than it ever had before.

"It's a pity Eleanor didn't speak sooner," he said.

"She thought less of it because Mrs. Puttock is a vulgar old gossip."

"Yes; but I'm afraid there may be something in it. Why did Eleanor tell you now?"

"Because I was speaking to her about the way Mr. Medland monopolised Alicia in the Park the other afternoon."

"Oh, that was my fault."

"It makes no difference how it came about. Willie, she had eyes and ears for no one else," and Lady Eynesford's voice became very earnest.

"But it's preposterous, Mary. You must be wrong. There couldn't possibly be anything of the kind."

"You know the sort of girl she is," his wife went on. "She's—well, she's easily caught by an idea, and rather romantic, and—really, dear, we ought to be careful."

"I can't believe it. If it's true, Medland has treated me very badly."

"What does he care?" asked Lady Eynesford. "How I wish she would go away! Nothing I say seems to make any impression on her."

"Perhaps Medland has noticed nothing, even if you're right about Alicia."

"He couldn't help noticing."

"What? Do you mean she makes it——?"

"I don't want to say anything unkind, but—well, yes, I'm afraid she does."

The Governor took a pace along the room.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed impatiently, "the way we get mixed up with these people is absurdly awkward. First there's Dick——"

"That's nothing to this. Dick was never really serious, and Alicia's always serious, if she thinks about a thing at all."

"Well, well, of course it must be stopped. What are you going to do?"

"She must be told," said Lady Eynesford.

"I won't tell her."

"Then I must."

"I wonder if you're not wrong after all."

"Oh, watch them!" retorted Lady Eynesford, and, leaving her husband, she sought Alicia and invited her to come and have a talk in the veranda.

Alicia, when thus summoned, was sitting with Eleanor Scaife, and they were both watching Captain Heseltine's fox terrier jump over a walking-stick under his master's tuition. It was a suitable enough amusement for a hot day; and it was engrossing enough to prevent Eleanor raising her eyes at the sound of Lady Eynesford's voice. In fact, she was not over and above anxious to meet that lady's glance. Eleanor had, in the light of recent events, grown rather doubtful of the wisdom of her wonderful discretion, and Lady Eynesford had intimated, with her usual clearness of statement, a decided opinion that not Eleanor, but she herself was the proper person to judge what should and should not be told to Alicia. She had enforced her moral by hinting at very distressing consequences which might follow on Eleanor's unfortunate reticence.

"I sometimes think," Eleanor remarked to Heseltine, when Alicia had left them, "that perfect openness and candour are always best."

Captain Heseltine lowered the walking-stick and looked at her with an air of expectancy.

"It saves so much misunderstanding, if you tell everybody everything right out," continued Eleanor.

"For my part," returned Heseltine, with an earnestness which he rarely displayed, "I differ utterly. I've never in my life told anybody anything without being sorry I hadn't held my tongue."

"Oh, you mean your private affairs."

"Well, and you? Oh, I see. You only mean other people's. Agreed, agreed! Perfect openness and candour about them by all means!"

"I am quite serious. One never knows how much harm may be done by concealing them."

"Got a murder on your conscience?"

"Oh, not exactly," sighed Eleanor.

"You're like that chap Kilshaw. He's always talking as if he had something awful up his sleeve."

"Perhaps he has."

As Eleanor said this, she jumped up and ran to meet Alicia, whom she saw coming toward her. Lady Eynesford had wasted no time over her task.

The Captain, being left alone, did the appropriate thing. He soliloquised.

"She'd have told me in another half-minute," said he, with a chuckle. "It was choking her. Yet she's a sensible one as they go."

Whom or what class he meant by "they" it is merciful to his ignorant prejudices to leave unrevealed.

CHAPTER XVIII

BY AN OVERSIGHT OF SOCIETY'S

François Gaspard was a pleasant and cheerful man, good company, and genial to his neighbours and comrades, but it may be doubted whether Society had not made a grave mistake in not hanging him at the earliest opportunity. In his younger days he had lived in perpetual warfare against Society, its institutions and constitutions—a warfare that he carried on without scruple and without quarter: he would have had no cause for complaint had he been dealt with on this basis of his own choosing. Society, however, had chosen to fancy that it could reform François, or, failing that, could keep him alive and yet harmless. Thanks to this sanguine view, he found himself, at the age of forty-five, a free man in New Lindsey; and, thinking that he and his native country had had about enough of one another, he had enrolled himself as a subject of her Majesty, and had plunged into the affairs of his new home with his usual energy. François was not indeed quite the man he had been in his palmy time, his nerve was not so good, and his life was more comfortable, and therefore not so lightly to be risked; but he had made no renunciations, and often regretted that New Lindsey was a barren soil, wherein the seed he sowed bore little fruit. He could not be happy without a secret society, and that he had established in Kirton; but it was, he ruefully

admitted, hardly more than a toy, a mockery, the merest *simulacrum*. The members displayed no alacrity; they were but five all told, besides himself: a bookseller's assistant, a watchmaker (he was a German, but the larger cause harmonised all differences), two artisans, and—what is either natural or strange, according to one's estimation of parliamentary government—a doorkeeper in the Houses of Parliament. They used to meet at Gaspard's lodgings, regret, in tones as loud as prudence permitted, the abuses of the *status quo*, spend a social evening, and return to the outer world with a tickling sense of mystery and potential destructiveness. Gaspard held the very lowest opinion of them; he acknowledged that the "propaganda by action" took small root in New Lindsey, and when it came into his head that Mr. Benham was worse than superfluous, he admitted with a shrug the great difficulties that lay in the way of removing his acquaintance. A man could not do everything by himself, the matter was after all not very pressing, and he almost made up his mind to let Mr. Benham live. Such was the chain of his reflections, and if Society had clearly realised the way he looked at such things, it can hardly be supposed that Gaspard would have been left unhanged.

Nevertheless, almost academic as the question was, Gaspard indulged his humour by hinting to his associates that, in certain contingencies, there might be work for their hands. He would not be more explicit, for he was distrustful of them; but this vague hint was quite enough to cause some perturbation. The bookseller's assistant turned rather pale, and expressed a preference for waiting

till one final, decisive, and overwhelming blow could be struck. He was understood to favour a wholesale massacre at Government House, but reminded his hearers of the dangers of hasty action. The watchmaker was strong on the division of functions: one man was valuable in counsel, another in the field; he belonged, he said, to the former category. The artisans smiled broadly over their drink, and openly declared that the President must "give 'em a lead." The doorkeeper reinforced this suggestion by reminding them that he was a husband and father, whereas Gaspard was a bachelor. All united in asking for further information, and were annoyed when Gaspard referred them to the rule governing such associations as theirs, namely, that the member to carry out the deed, if resolved upon, should be designated before the nature of the deed was discussed, or its desirability finally decided. If this were not so, he pointed out, a member's opinion on the merits of the scheme might be biassed by the knowledge that he would, if fate so willed, have to carry it out. According to his rule, the designated member had no vote.

"Not know who it is?" exclaimed the doorkeeper. "Why, a man might be asked to take off his own brother!"

"Perfectly," smiled Gaspard. "It is to avoid any painful conflict of duties that the rule exists." He looked round the table with a broader smile, and added—"Shall it be the lot?"

The feeling of the meeting was against the lot. They preferred to choose their man.

"Let's vote by ballot," suggested the watchmaker.

"Agreed!" cried Gaspard, and they flung folded scraps of paper into a hat.

There was one vote for the doorkeeper: it came out first, and the doorkeeper wiped a bead of sweat from his brow. But soon he smiled again; the other four were all for Gaspard, who returned thanks for the honour in a few words.

"As soon as the information is complete, I will summon you again," he said, dismissing them, and lighting his cigarette with a chuckle of mockery. Really, it seemed impossible to do anything with these creatures, and Gaspard did not feel quite so eager as he used to be to put his own neck in the noose. If he acted, he must, probably, fly from New Lindsey, and he was very comfortable and doing very well there. No; on second thoughts he doubted if the duty of removing Mr. Benham was absolutely imperative.

Meanwhile Benham would have been much surprised to hear that his latter end was a subject of dispassionate contemplation to the little Frenchman. No subject was more remote from his own thoughts. He was in high feather, the hour was fast approaching which was to witness his triumph and his revenge; the gag would soon be taken from his mouth, and his deadly disclosure would smite Medland like a sword. His sentiment was satisfied with the prospect, and Kilshaw took care that his pocket should have nothing to complain of. He refused indeed to provide for Benham in his own employ for obvious reasons; but he promised him a strong, though private, recommendation to an important house, in addition to the agreed price of his information, which was a thou-

sand pounds, half to be paid in advance. The first five hundred pounds was paid on the day before the Premier's great meeting, for, if the Ministry weathered Monday's storm, the last weapon in the arsenal was to be brought into use. So said Mr. Kilshaw, still hoping to avoid the necessity, still resolute to face it if he must. Benham took his money and went his way, with one of those familiar, confidential looks and jocular speeches which filled Kilshaw's cup of disgust to the brim. Whenever the man did that sort of thing, Kilshaw was within an ace of kicking him down-stairs and throwing away the poisoned weapon ; but he never did.

Mere chance willed that as Gaspard on Saturday evening was going home, having done a hard day's work at organising a trade procession for the next day, he should fall in with Benham. He stopped to speak, feeling an interest in all that concerned the man; and Benham, radiant and effusive from the process of "moistening his luck," would not be satisfied till Gaspard had agreed to sup with him and at his charges.

"Oh, if you like to do a good deed to an enemy," laughed the Frenchman, letting the other seize him by the arm and lead him off; and he thought to himself that he might as well spare so liberal a host. Might there not be other suppers in the future ? Dead men, if they told no tales, paid for no suppers either.

After the meal they had another bottle of wine, and Benham called for a pack of cards. François won, and politely apologised.

"It is too bad of me," he said, "after your hospitality, *mon cher*."

"Oh, five pound won't hurt me, or ten either," cried Benham, draining his glass.

"No? Happy man!"

"I know where money comes from," continued Benham, with a wink.

"Ah, a man who knows what you do!" retorted Gaspard. "Have you forgotten telling me—you know—about our good Medland?"

"Did I tell you? Well, I had forgotten. Who cares! It's true—every word."

"Oh, I don't say it isn't," laughed Gaspard incredulously.

"But you don't believe it is?"

"We can't help our thoughts, but—" and another laugh ended his sentence.

Benham looked round. They were alone. Cautiously he drew a bag of money and a roll of notes from his pocket. For a moment he opened the bag and showed the gleam inside; wetting his forefinger, he parted the notes for a second.

"Some one believes it," he said, "up to five hundred pound."

"That's the sort of belief I'd like to inspire," laughed Gaspard, watching the money back into its pocket with a curious eye.

"Come, you're not drinking," urged the hospitable Benham.

"You don't show me the way," untruthfully answered the guest, as Benham complacently buttoned up his coat, little imagining that his neighbour was weighing a question, very momentous to him, in the light of fresh information.

Five hundred pounds! The duty of removing Benham began to look rather imperative again, but from a different point of view. François had

of late worked for his living, a mode of existence which seemed to him anomalous, and ill suited to his genius. Five hundred pounds meant, to a man of his frugal habits and tact in eliciting hospitality, three years' comfortable idleness. It was no doubt apparent now that Benham had already parted with his secret, and that, if anything happened to him, the secret would still remain to vex the good Medland. Gaspard regretted this ; he would have liked to combine public and private advantage in the job. But a man must not ask everything, or he may end by having to take nothing. Here sat a drunken fool with five hundred pounds ; opposite to him sat a sober sharp-wit with only five. The situation was full of suggestion. If the five hundred could be got from the fool without violence, well and good ; but really, thought Mr. Gaspard, their transference to the sharp-wit must be effected somehow, or that sharp-wit had no title to the name.

"Care to play any more?" asked Benham.

"Not I, my friend, I have robbed you enough."

"And about time for the luck to turn, isn't it? Well, I don't care! What shall we do?"

"What you will," answered the Frenchman absently.

Benham pulled his beard, then leant forward and put a question with an intoxicated leer. A laugh of feigned reproof burst from Gaspard. Benham seemed to urge him, and at last he said,

"Oh, if you're bent on it, I can be your guide."

The two men left the house arm-in-arm, went down the street, and crossed Digby Square. It was late, and few people were about, but Gaspard saw one acquaintance. The doorkeeper was stroll-

ing along on his way home, and Gaspard bade him good-night in a cheery voice as they passed him. The doorkeeper stood and watched the pair for a minute as they left the Square and turned down a narrow street which led to the poorer part of the town, and thence to the quays. He heard Gaspard's high-pitched voice and shrill laughter, and, in answer, Benham's thick tones and heavy shout of drunken mirth. Once or twice these sounds repeated themselves, then they ceased; the footsteps of the Frenchman and his companion died away in the distance. The doorkeeper went on his way, thinking with relief that Mr. Gaspard, for all his tall talk, was more at home with a bottle than with a knife or a bomb.

Notwithstanding his dissipation, Gaspard was afoot very early in the morning. It was hardly light, and the deep scratch of finger-nails on his face—it is so awkward when drunken fools wake at the wrong minute—attracted no attention from the few people he encountered. He did not give them long to look at him, for he hurried swiftly through the streets, toward the quays where the ships lay loading their cargoes. He seemed to have urgent business to transact down there, business that would brook no delay, and that was, if one might guess from his uneasy glances over his shoulder, of a private nature. With one hand he held tight hold of something in his trousers pocket, the other rested on his belt, hard by a little revolver. In his business it is necessary to be ready for everything.

Meanwhile Mr. Benham, having no affairs to trouble him, and no more business to transact, stayed where he was.

CHAPTER XIX

LAST CHANCES

At an early hour on Sunday all Kirton seemed astir. The streets were alive with thronging people, with banners, with inchoate and still amorphous processions, with vendors of meat, drink, and newspapers. According to the official arrangements, the proceedings were not to begin till one o'clock, and, in theory, the forenoon hours were left undisturbed; but, what with the people who were taking part in the demonstration, and those who were going to look on, and those who hoped to suck some profit to themselves out of the day's work, the ordinary duties and observances of a Sunday were largely neglected, and Mr. Puttock, passing on his way to chapel at the head of his family, did not lack material for reprobation in the temporary superseding of religious obligations.

The Governor and his family drove to the Cathedral, according to their custom, Eleanor Scaife having pleaded in vain for leave to walk about the streets instead. Lady Eynesford declined to recognise the occasion, and Eleanor had to content herself with stealthy glances to right and left till the church doors engulfed her. The only absentee was Alicia Derosne, and she was not walking about the streets, but sitting under the veranda, with a book unopened on her knees, and her eyes set in empty fixedness on the horizon. The luxuriant growth of a southern summer filled her nostrils

with sweet scents, and the wind, blowing off the sea, tempered the heat to a fresh and balmy warmth; the waves sparkled in the sun, and the world was loud in boast of its own beauty; but poor Alicia, like many a maid before, was wondering how long this wretched life was to last, and how any one was ever happy. Faith bruised and trust misplaced blotted out for her the joy of living and the exultation of youth. If these things were true, why did the sun shine, and how could the world be merry? If these things were true, for her the sun shone no more, and the merriment was stilled for ever. So she thought, and, if she were not right, it needed a philosopher to tell her so; and then she would not have believed him, but caught her woe closer to her heart, and nursed it with fiercer tenderness against his shallow prating. Perhaps he might have told her, too, that it is cruel kindness unasked to set people on a pinnacle, and, when they cannot keep foothold on that slippery height, to scorn their fall. Other things such an one might well have said, but more wisely left unsaid; for cool reason is a blister to heartache, and heartache is not best cured by blisters. Never yet did a child stop crying for being told its pain was nought and would soon be gone. Yet this prescription had been Lady Eynesford's—although she was no philosopher, to her knowledge—for Alicia, and it had left the patient protesting that she felt no pain at all, and yet feeling it all the more.

"What do you accuse me of? Why do you speak to me?" she had burst out. "What is it to me what he has done or not done? What do you mean, Mary?"

Before this torrent of questions Lady Eynesford

tactfully retreated a little way. A warning against hasty love dwindled to an appeal whether so much friendliness, such constant meetings, either with daughter or with father, were desirable.

"I'm sure I'm sorry for the poor child," she said; "but in this world——"

"Suppose it's all a slander!"

"My dear Alicia, do they say such things about a man in his position unless there's something in them?"

"It's nothing to me," said Alicia again.

"Of course, you can do nothing abrupt; but you'll gradually withdraw from their acquaintance, won't you?"

Alicia had escaped without a promise, pleading for time to think in the same breath that she denied any concern in the matter. She was by way of thinking now, and all that Lady Eynesford had said repeated itself in her mind as she looked out on the garden and the glimpses of the town beyond. She understood now Dick's banishment, her sister-in-law's unresting hostility to the Medlands, and the reason why she had been pressed to go to Australia. She spared a minute to grief for Daisy, but her own sorrow would not be denied, and engrossed her again. In the solitude she had sought, she cried to herself, "Why didn't they tell me before? What's the use of telling me now?" Then she would fly back to the hope that the thing was not true, that her friends had clutched too hastily at anything which would save her from what they dreaded, and, she confessed to herself, rightly dreaded. No, she would not believe it yet; and, if it were not true, why should she not be happy? Why should she not, even though she did what

Dick had not dared to do, and what, when Coxon asked her, she had laughed at for an absurdity?

There began to be more movement outside the gates. The first note of band-music was wafted to her ear, and the roll of wheels announced the return of the church-goers. She roused herself and went to meet them. They were agog with excitement, partly about the meeting, partly about the murder. While Eleanor was trying to tell her of the state of popular feeling, the Governor seized her arm and began to detail the story of the discovery.

"You remember the man?" he asked. "He was at our flower-show—had a sort of row with Medland, you know. Well, he's been found murdered (so the police think) in a low part of the town! The woman who keeps the house found him. He didn't come down in the morning, and, as she couldn't make him hear, she forced the door, and found him with his throat cut."

"Awful!" shuddered Lady Eynesford. "He looked such a respectable man too."

"Ah, I fancy he'd gone a bit to the bad lately—taken to drinking and so on."

"He was a friend of Mr. Kilshaw's, wasn't he?" asked Alicia.

"A sort of hanger-on, I think. Anyhow, there he was dead, and with his pockets empty."

"Perhaps he killed himself," she suggested.

"They think not. They've arrested the woman, but she declares she knows nothing about it!"

"Poor man!" said Alicia; and, at another time, she might have thought a good deal about the horrible end of a man whom she had known as an acquaintance. But, as it was, she soon forgot him

again, and, leaving the rest, returned to her solitary seat.

In the town, the news of the murder was but one ruffle more on the wave of excitement, and not a very marked one. Few people knew Benham's name, and when the first agitation following on the discovery of the body died away and the onlookers found there was no news to be had, they turned away to join the processions or to stare at them. The police were left to pursue their investigations in peace, and they soon reached a conclusion. The landlady of the house where Benham died lived alone, save for the occasional presence of her son: he was away at work in an outlying district, and she had been the only person in the house that night. She let beds to single men, she said, and the night before two men had arrived, one the worse for drink. They had asked for adjoining rooms. As they went up-stairs, she had heard the one who had been drinking say to the other, "What are you bringing me here for? This isn't the place for what I want." His companion, the shorter of the two, whom she thought she would know again, had answered—"All in good time; you go and lie down, and I'll fetch what you want." Soon after, the short one came down and asked if she had any brandy; she gave him a bottle half full and he went up-stairs again. She heard voices raised as if in dispute for a few minutes, and one of them—she could not say which—said something which sounded like "Well, finish the drink first, and then I'll go." Silence followed, at least she could not hear any more talking; and presently, it not being her business to spy on gentlemen, she went to bed, and knew nothing more till she woke at seven o'clock.

Going up-stairs, she found one door open and the room empty, not the room the two men had been in together, but the other. The second door was locked, and she did not knock; gentlemen often slept late. At half-past ten she ventured to knock, got no answer, knocked again and again, and finally, with the help of the man from next door, broke the lock and found the taller of the two men dead on the bed. She had at once summoned the police; and that, she concluded, was all she knew about the matter, and she was a respectable, hard-working woman, a widow who could produce her marriage certificate in case any person present desired to inspect it.

The Superintendent listened to her protestations of virtue with an ironical smile, told her the police knew her house very well, frightened her wholesomely, took down her very vague description of the missing man, and kept her in custody; but he did not seriously doubt the truth of her story, and, if it were true, the man he wanted was evidently the sober man, the shorter man, who had introduced his friend to the house on a pretext, had called for drink, and vanished in the early morning, leaving a dead man behind him. Who was this man? Where did he come from? Had he been missing since last night? On these inquiries the Superintendent launched several intelligent men, and then was forced for the time to turn his attention to the business of the day.

To search a large town for a missing man takes time, and the searchers did not happen to fall in with Company B of Procession 3, which at one o'clock had mustered in Digby Square, prepared to march to the Public Park. Had they done so,

it might or might not have seemed to them worth noticing that Company B of Procession 3, which was composed of carpenters and joiners, had missed some one, namely the officer whom they called their "Marshal," and who was to have ordered their ranks and marched at their head; and the name of their Marshal was none other than François Gaspard. The Superintendent himself was keeping watch over Company B, but, in a professionally Olympian scorn of processions, he was far from asking or caring to know who the Marshal was, and indeed, if he had known, he would scarcely have drawn such a lightning-quick inference as that the missing Marshal and the missing murderer were one and the same. So Mr. Gaspard's absence was passed over with a few curses on his laziness, or, from the more charitable, a surmise that there had been a misunderstanding, and Company B, having appointed a new Marshal, went on its way.

One demonstration of the public will is much like another in the shape it takes and the incidents it produces. This Sunday's was, however, as friends and foes agreed, remarkable not only for the numbers who took part, but still more for the spirit which animated it, and when the Premier and his colleagues made their appearance on the great platform there was no room to doubt that somehow, by his gifts or his faults, his policy or his demagogic arts, his love of humanity or his adroit wooing of popularity, Medland held a position in the eyes of the common people of the capital which had seldom or never been equalled in the history of the Colony. He had caused them to be called together in order to raise their enthusiasm, and to elicit from them a visible, unmistaka-

ble pledge of support. But, when he stood before them, bare-headed, in vain beckoning for silence, their cries and cheers told him that his task was rather to moderate than to stir up, and the first part of his speech was a somewhat laboured proof of the consistency of gatherings of that nature with the proper independence of representative assemblies. The people heard him through this argument in respectful silence, clapping their hands when, at the end of it, he paused before he passed to the second part of his speech. At the first sign of attack, at the first quietly drawn contrast between what the seceders had promised and what they were doing, his audience was a changed one. Fierce murmurs of assent and groans became audible now, and when Medland, caught by the contagion that spread to him from his listeners, gave rein to his feelings, and launched into a passionate declaration that, to his mind, the liberty claimed for members did not mean liberty to betray those who had trusted them, the murmurs and groans rose into one tumult of savage applause, and men raised both hands over their heads and shook them, as though they would have clenched every word that fell from him with a blow of the fist.

Daisy Medland sat just behind her father, exulting in his triumph, and, at every happy stroke, glancing at Norburn, and by sharing her joy with him doubling his. When the Premier had finished, and the last resolution had been carried, she ran to him, crying, "Splendid! I never heard you so good. Wasn't he splendid?" and looking so completely joyful that Medland was sure she must quite have forgotten Dick Derosne. She took his arm, and they made their way together to a carriage

which was in waiting. An escort of police surrounded it, to save the Premier from his friends, and he, with Daisy, Norburn, and Mr. Floyd, the Treasurer, got in without disturbance. The coachman drove off rapidly down the main avenue, distancing the enthusiasts who would have had the horses out of the shafts. They passed a long row of carriages, belonging to people who had not feared to come and look on from a distance, and at last, knowing the procession would go back another way, Medland bade his driver stop under the trees, and lit a cigar.

"And I wonder if it will all make any difference!" said he, puffing delightedly. He had all an old political organiser's love for a big meeting, which does not exclude scepticism as to its value.

"Oh, you gave it 'em finely," said the Treasurer.

"I believe it'll frighten two or three anyhow," observed Norburn.

"I *know* we shall win to-morrow," cried Daisy, squeezing her father's arm.

"Ah! here's a special Sunday evening paper—how we encourage wickedness!" said the Premier, seeing a newsvendor approaching. "Let's see what they say of us!"

"I've seen it all for myself," remarked Daisy, and she went on chattering to the other two, who were ready to talk over every incident of the meeting, as people who have been to meetings ever are. On they went, reminding one another of the bald man in the third row who cheered so lustily, of the fat woman who had somehow got into the front row and fanned herself all the time, of rude things shouted about Messrs. Puttock and Coxon, and so forth. The Premier, listening with one ear, opened

his paper; but the first thing he saw was not about his procession. He started and looked closer, then gave a sudden, covert glance at his companions; they were busy in talk, and, with breathless haste, he devoured the meagre details of Benham's wretched death. The end reached, he let the paper fall on his knees, lay back, and took a long pull at his cigar. He was shocked—yes, he supposed he was shocked. He had known the man, and it was shocking to think of his throat being cut; yes, he had known him, and he didn't like to think of that. But— The Premier gave a long-drawn sigh of relief. That unknown murderer's hand had done great things for him. His daughter was safe now —anyhow, she was safe. She could never be subject to the degradation the dead man had once hinted at; and when he thought of what the man had threatened, pity for him died out of Medland's heart. More—although Kilshaw no doubt knew something—there was a chance that Benham had kept his own counsel, and that his employer would be helpless without his aid. Medland's sanguine mind caught eagerly at the chance, and in a moment turned it into a hope—almost a conviction. Then the whole thing would go down to the grave with the unlucky man, and not even its spectre survive to trouble him. For if no one had certain knowledge, if there were never more than gossip, growing, as time passed, fainter and fainter from having no food to feed on, would not utter silence follow at last, so that the things that had been might be as if they had never been?"

"Well, what do they say about us?" asked the Treasurer.

"Oh, nothing much," he answered, thrusting

the paper behind him with a careless air. He did not want to discuss what the paper had told him.

"What's happened to-day," said Daisy, "ought to make all the difference, oughtn't it, father?"

"I hope it will," replied the Premier; but, for once in his life, he was not thinking most about political affairs.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAW *VERSUS* RULE 3

AMONG the many tired but satisfied lovers of liberty who sought their houses that night, while an enthusiastic remnant was still parading the streets, illuminations yet shining from windows, and weary police treading their unending beats, was the doorkeeper, who had borne a banner in Company A of Procession 1. His friend the watchmaker came with him, to have a bit of supper and exchange congratulations and fulminations. Hardly, however, had the doorkeeper pledged the cause in a first draught when his wife broke in on his oration by handing him a letter, which she said a boy in a blue jersey had left for him about ten o'clock in the morning, just after he had started to join his company. The envelope was cheap and coarse; there was no direction outside. The doorkeeper opened it. It was addressed to no named person and it bore no signature. It was very brief, being confined to these simple words—"You did not see me last night. Remember Rule 3."

The doorkeeper laid the letter down, with a hurried glance at his friend, whose face was buried in a mug. He knew the handwriting; he knew who it was that he had not seen; he remembered Rule 3, the rule that said—"The only and inevitable penalty of treachery is death." He turned white and took a hasty gulp at his liquor.

"Who brought this?" he asked.

"I told you," answered his wife; "a lad in a blue jersey; he looked as if he might be from the harbour." She put food before them, adding as she did so—"I suppose you've been too full of your politics to hear much about the murder?"

"The murder?" exclaimed the watchmaker. The doorkeeper crumpled up his letter and stuffed it into the pocket of his coat, while his wife read to them the story of the discovery. The watchmaker listened with interest.

"Benham!" he remarked. "I never heard the name, did you?"

"You know him, Ned," said the doorkeeper's wife; "him as Mr. Gaspard used to go about with."

By a sudden common impulse, the eyes of the two men met; the woman went off to brew them a pot of tea, and left them fearfully gazing at one another.

"What stuff!" said the watchmaker uneasily. "It was only his blow. What reason had he—?" He paused and added, "Seen him to-day, Ned?"

"No," answered Ned, fingering his note.

"Wasn't he in the procession?"

"I didn't see him."

"When did you see him last?"

The doorkeeper hesitated.

"Night of our last committee," he whispered finally.

"Oh, there's nothing in it," said the watchmaker reassuringly. He had not a letter in his pocket.

The doorkeeper opened his mouth to speak, but seeing his wife approaching, he shut it again and busied himself with his meal.

"What was the letter, Ned?"

"Oh, about the procession," he answered.

"Then you got it too late. Who was it from?"

"If you'd give us the tea," he broke out roughly, "and let the damned letter alone, it 'ud be a deal better."

"La, you needn't fly out at a woman so," said Mrs. Evans. "It ain't the way to treat his wife, is it, Mister?"

"Mister" gallantly reproved his friend, but pleaded that they were both weary, and weary legs made short tempers. Giving them the tea, she left them to themselves; her work was not finished till three small children were safely in bed.

The sensation of having one's neck for the first time within measurable distance of a rope must needs be somewhat disquieting. The doorkeeper, in spite of his secret society doings, was a timid man, with a vastly respectful fear of the law. To talk about things, to vapour idly about them over the cups, is very different from being actually, even though remotely, mixed up in them. Ned Evans was a man of some education: he read the papers, accounts of crimes and reports of trials; he had heard of accessories after and before the fact. Was he not an accessory after the fact? He fancied they did not hang such; but if they caught him, and all that about Gaspard and the society came out, would they not call him an accessory before the fact? The noose seemed really rather near, and in his frightened fancy, as he lay sleepless beside his snoring wife, the rope dangled over his head. The poor wretch was between the devil and the deep sea—between stern law and cruel Rule 3. He dared not toss about, his wife would ask him what ailed him; he lay as still as he could, bitterly

cursing his folly for mingling in such affairs, bitterly cursing the Frenchman who led him on into the trap and left him fast there. How could he save his neck? And he restlessly rent the band of his coarse night-shirt, that pressed on his throat with a horrible suggestion of what might be. Where was that Gaspard? Had he fled over the sea? Ah, if he could be sure of that, and sure that the dreaded man would not return! Or was he lurking in some secret hole, ready to steal out and avenge a violation of Rule 3? The doorkeeper had always feared the man; in the lurid light of this deed, Gaspard's image grew into a monster of horror, threatening sudden and swift revenge for disobedience or treachery. No; he must stand firm. But what of the police? Well, men sleep somehow, and at last he fell asleep, holding the band of the night-shirt away from his throat: if he fell asleep with that pressing on him, God knew what he might dream.

"It's very lucky," remarked the Superintendent of Police, who had a happy habit of looking at the bright side of things, to one of his subordinates, "that this Benham seems to have had no relations and precious few friends."

"No widows coming crying about," observed the subordinate, with an assenting nod.

"Nothing known of him except that he came to Kirton a few months back, did nothing, seemed to have plenty of money, took his liquor, played a hand at cards, hurt nobody, seemingly knew nobody."

"Why, I saw him with Mr. Puttock."

"Yes; but Mr. Puttock knows nothing of him, except that he said he came from Shepherdstown.

That's why Puttock was civil to him. The place is in his constituency."

"Got any idea, sir?" the subordinate ventured to ask.

The Superintendent was about to answer in the negative, when a detective entered the room.

"Well, I've found one missing man for you," he said, in a satisfied tone.

"One missing man!" echoed his superior, scornfully. "In a place o' this size I'd always find you twenty."

The sergeant went on, unperturbed,

"François Gaspard, known as politician and agitator, didn't go home to his lodgings in Kettle Street last night, was to have acted as Marshal in Company B of Procession 3 to-day, didn't turn up, hasn't turned up to-night, don't owe any rent, hasn't taken any clothes."

"Oh!" said the Superintendent morosely. "Left an address?"

"Left no address, sir."

"How did he go, and where?"

"Not known, sir."

"Good Lord!" moaned the Superintendent, "and what's your salary?"

The sergeant's good-humour was impregnable.

"Give me time," he said, and the sentence was almost drowned in a loud knock at the door. An instant later Kilshaw rushed in.

"What's this, Dawson?" he cried to the Superintendent; "what's this about the murder?"

"You haven't heard, sir?"

"I went out of town to avoid this infernal row to-day, and am only just back."

Dawson smiled discreetly. He could under-

stand that the proceedings of the day would not attract Mr. Kilshaw.

"But is it true," Kilshaw went on eagerly, "that Mr. Benham has been murdered?"

"Well, it looks like it, sir," and Dawson gave a full account of the circumstances.

"And the motive?" asked Kilshaw.

"Robbery, I suppose. His pockets were empty, and according to our information he was generally flush of money; where he got it, I don't know."

"Ah!" said Kilshaw meditatively; "his pockets empty! And have you no clew?"

"Not what you'd call a clew. Did you know the gentleman, sir?"

Kilshaw replied by saying that Mr. Puttock had introduced Benham to him and the acquaintance had continued—it was a political acquaintance purely.

"You don't know anything about him before he came here?"

Kilshaw suddenly perceived that he was being questioned, whereas his object had been to question.

"You say," he observed, "that you haven't got what you'd call a clew. What do you mean?"

"You can tell Mr. Kilshaw, if you like," said the Superintendent to the sergeant, who repeated his information.

"Gaspard! why that's the fellow the Premier—" and Mr. Kilshaw stopped short. After a moment, he asked abruptly, "Were there any papers on the body?"

"None, sir."

"I suppose there's nothing really to connect this man Gaspard with it?"

"Oh, nothing at present, sir. Did you say you'd known the deceased before he——?"

"If I'm called at the inquest, I shall tell all I know," said Kilshaw, rising. "It's not much."

"Happen to know if he had any relations, sir?"

"H'm. He was a widower, I believe."

"Children?"

"Really," said Mr. Kilshaw, with a faint smile, "I don't know."

And he escaped from pertinacious Mr. Dawson with some alacrity. When he was outside, he stopped suddenly. "Shall I tell 'em to apply to Medland?" he asked himself, with a malicious chuckle. "No, I'll wait a bit yet," and he walked on, wondering whether by any chance Mr. Benham had been done to death to save the Premier. This fanciful idea he soon dismissed with a laugh; it never entered his head, prejudiced as he was, to think that Medland himself had any hand in the matter. After all, he was a man of common sense, and he quickly arrived at a conclusion which he expressed by exclaiming,

"The poor fool's been showing his money. Who's got my five hundred now, I wonder?"

His wonderings would have been satisfied, had Aladdin's carpet or other magical contrivance transported him to where the steamship *Pride of the South* was ploughing her way through the waves, bound from Kirton to San Francisco, with liberty to touch at several South American ports. A thick-set, short man, shipped at the last moment as cook's mate, in substitution for a truant, was lying on his back, smoking a cigarette, looking up at the bright stars, and ever and again gently pressing his hand on a little lump inside his shirt. He seemed at peace with all the world, though he was ready to be at war, if need be, and his knife,

burnished and clean, lay handy to his fingers. He turned on his side and composed himself to sleep, his chest rising and falling with regular, uninterrupted breathing. Once he smiled: he was thinking of Ned Evans, the doorkeeper; then he gave himself a little shake, closed his eyes, and forgot all the troubles of this weary world. So sleep children, so—we are told—the just: so slept M. François Gaspard, on his way to seek fresh woods and pastures new.

CHAPTER XXI

ALL THERE WAS TO TELL

THE custom in New Lindsey was that every Monday during the session of Parliament the Executive Council should meet at Government House, and, under the presidency of the Governor, formally ratify and adopt the arrangements as to the business of the coming week which its members had decided upon at their Cabinet meetings. It is to be hoped that, in these days, when we all take an interest in our Empire, everybody knows that the Executive Council is the outward, visible, and recognised form of that impalpable, unrecognised, all-powerful institution, the Cabinet, consisting in fact, though not in theory, of the same persons, save that the Governor is present when the meeting is of the Council, and absent when it is of the Cabinet—a difference of less moment than it sounds, seeing that, except in extreme cases, the Governor has little to do but listen to what is going to be done. However, forms doubtless have their value, and at any rate they must be observed; so on this Monday morning the Executive Council was to meet as usual, although nobody knew where the Cabinet would be that time twenty-four hours. Lady Eynesford, who wanted her husband to drive her out, thought the meeting under the circumstances mere nonsense—which it very likely was—and said so, which betrayed inexperience, and Alicia Derosne asked what time it took place.

"Eleven sharp," said the Governor, and returned to the account of the murder.

Time after time in the last few days Alicia had told herself that she could bear it no longer. At one moment she believed nothing, the next, nothing was too terrible for her to believe; now she would fly to Australia, or home, or anywhere out of New Lindsey; now a straightforward challenge to Medland alone would serve her turn. Sometimes she felt as if she could put the whole thing on one side; five minutes later found her pinning her whole life on the issue of it. Under her guarded face and calm demeanour, the storm of divided and conflicting instincts and passions raged, and long solitary rambles became a necessary outlet for what she dared show to none. She shrank from seeing Medland, and yet longed to speak with him; she felt that to mention the topic to him was impossible, and yet, if they met, inevitable; that she would not have strength to face him, and yet could not let him go without clearing up the mystery. She told herself at one moment that she hardly knew him, at the next that between them nothing could be too secret for utterance.

What she hoped and feared befell her that morning. She went out for a walk in the Park, and before long she met the Premier, with his daughter and Norburn. The two last were laughing and talking—their quarrel was quite forgotten now—and Medland himself, she thought, looked as though his load of care were a little less heavy. The two men explained that they were on their way—a roundabout way, they confessed—to the Council, and had seized the chance of some fresh air, while Daisy was full of stories about yester-

day's triumph, that left room only for a passing reference to yesterday's tragedy.

"I didn't like him at all," she said; "but still it's dreadful—a man one knew ever so slightly!"

Alicia agreed, and the next instant she found herself practically alone with Medland; for Daisy ran off to pick a wild-flower that caught her eye in the wood, and Norburn followed her. Not knowing whether to be glad or sorry, she made no effort to escape, and was silent while Medland began to speak of his prospects in that evening's division.

Suddenly she paused in her walk and lifted her eyes to his.

"You look happier," she said.

Medland's conscience smote him: he was looking happier because the man was dead.

"It's at the prospect of being a free man to-morrow," he answered, with a smile. "You know Cincinnatus was very happy."

"But you're not like that."

"No, I suppose not. Say it's——"

"Never mind."

After a pause she made another attempt.

"Mr. Medland!"

"Yes?"

"You've been very good to me—yes, very good."

He turned to her with a gesture of disclaimer. She thought he was going to speak, but he did not.

"Whatever happens, I shall always remember that with—with deep gratitude."

"What is going to happen?" he asked, with an uneasy smile.

"Oh, how can I?" she burst out. "How can I say it? How can I ask you?"

As she spoke she stopped, and he followed her example. They stood facing one another now, as he replied gravely,

"Whatever you ask—let it be what it will—I will answer, truthfully." A pause before the last word perhaps betrayed a momentary struggle.

"What right have I? Why should you?"

"The right my—my desire to have your regard gives you. How can I ask for that, unless I am ready to tell you all you can wish to know?"

"I have heard," she began falteringly, "I have been told by—by people who, I suppose, were right to tell me——"

In a moment he understood her. A slight twitch of his mouth betrayed his trouble, but he came to her rescue.

"I don't know how it reached you," he said. "Perhaps I think you might have been—you need not have known it. But there is only one thing you can have heard, that it would distress you to speak of."

She said nothing, but fixed her eyes on his.

"I am right?" he asked. "It is about—my wife?"

She bowed her head. He stood silent for a moment, and she cried,

"It was only gossip—a woman's gossip; I did wrong to listen to it."

"Gossip," he said, "is often true. This is true," and he set his lips.

The worst often finds or makes people calm. She had flushed at first, but the colour went again, and she said quietly,

"If you have time and don't mind, I should like to hear it all."

She had forgotten what this request must mean to him, or perhaps she thought the time for pretence had gone by. If so, he understood, for he answered,

"It's your right."

Her eyes sank to the ground, but she did not quarrel with his words. She stood motionless while he told his story. He spoke with wilful brevity and dryness.

"I was a young man when I met her. She was married, and I went to the house. Her husband——"

"Did he ill-treat her?"

"No. In his way, I suppose he was fond of her. But—she didn't like his way. She was very beautiful, and I fell in love with her, and she with me. And we ran away."

"Is—is that all? Is there no——?"

"No excuse? No, I suppose, none. And I lived with her till she died four years ago. And—Daisy is our daughter."

"And he—the husband?"

"He did not divorce her. I don't know why not, perhaps because she asked him to—anyhow he didn't. And he outlived her: so she died—as she had lived."

"And is he still alive?"

"No; he is dead now." He was about to go on, but checked himself. Why add that horror? How the man died was nothing between her and him.

"Have you no—nothing to say?" she burst out, almost angrily. "You just tell me that and stop!"

"What is there to say? I have told you all

there is to tell. I loved her very much. I did what I could to make her happy, and I try to make up for it to Daisy. But there is nothing more to say."

She was angry that he would not defend himself. She was ready—ah, so ready!—to listen to his pleading. But he would not say a word for himself. Instead, he went on,

"She didn't want to come, but I made her. She repented, poor girl, all her life; she was never quite happy. It was all my doing. Still, I think she was happier with me, in spite of it."

A movement of impatience escaped from Alicia. Seeing it he added,

"I beg your pardon. I didn't want you to think hardly of her."

"I don't want to think of her at all. Was she—was she like Daisy?"

"Yes; but prettier."

"I don't know what you expect me to say," she exclaimed. "I know—I suppose some men don't think much of—of a thing like that. To me it is horrible. You simply followed your— Ah, I can't speak of it!" and she seemed to put him from her with a gesture of disgust.

He walked beside her in silence, his face set in the bitter smile it always wore when fate dealt hardly with him.

"I think I'll go straight home," she said, stopping suddenly. "You can join the others."

"Yes, that will be best. I'm not due at the Council just yet."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for telling me the truth. I—" Her false composure suddenly gave way. With a sob she stretched out her hands

toward him, crying, "Why didn't you tell me sooner?" and before he could answer her she turned and walked swiftly away, leaving him standing still on the pathway.

She was hardly inside the gates of Government House when she saw Eleanor Scaife, who hurried to meet her.

"Only think, Alicia!" she cried. "Dick is on his way home, and with such good news. We've just had a cable from him."

"Coming back!"

"Yes. He's engaged! He met the Grangers on their tour round the world—you know them, the great cotton people?—at Sydney, and he's engaged to the youngest girl, Violet—you remember her? It all happened in a fortnight. Mary and Lord Eynesford are delighted. It's just perfect. She's very pretty, and tremendously well off. I do declare, I never thought Dick would end so well! What a happy thought it was sending him away! Aren't you delighted?"

"It sounds very nice, doesn't it? I don't think I knew her more than just to speak to."

"Dick'll be here in four days. I've been looking for you to tell you for the last hour. Where have you been?"

"In the Park."

"Alone, as usual, you hermit?"

"Well, I met the Medlands and Mr. Norburn, and talked to them for a little while."

"Alicia! But it's no use talking to you. Come and find Mary."

"No, Eleanor, I'm tired, and—and hot. I'll go to my room."

"Oh, you must come and see her first."

"I can't."

"She'll be hurt, Alicia. She'll think you don't care. Come, dear."

"Tell her—tell her I'm coming directly. Eleanor, you must let me go," and breaking away she fled into the house.

Eleanor went alone to seek Lady Eynesford. Somehow Alicia's words had quenched her high spirits for the moment.

"Poor child! I do hope she hasn't been foolish," she mused. "Surely after what Mary told her—! Oh dear, I'm afraid it isn't all as happy as it is about Dick!"

And then she indulged in some very cynical meditations on the advantages of being a person of shallow emotions and changeful fancies, until she was roused by the sight of Medland and Norburn walking up to the house, to attend the Executive Council. From the window she closely watched the Premier as he approached; her mood wavered to and fro, but at last she summed up her impressions by remarking,

"Well, I suppose one might."

CHAPTER XXII

THE STORY OF A PHOTOGRAPH

Mr. Coxon may be forgiven for being, on this same important Monday, in a state of some nervous excitement. He had a severe attack of what are vulgarly called "the fidgets," and Sir John, who was spending the morning at the Club (for his court was not sitting), glanced at him over his eyeglasses with an irritated look. The ex-Attorney-General would not sit still, but flitted continually from window to table, and back from table to window, taking up and putting down journal after journal. Much depended, in Mr. Coxon's view, on the event of that day, for Sir John spoke openly of his approaching retirement, and an appointment sometimes thought worthy of a Premier's acceptance might be in Coxon's grasp before many weeks were past, if only Medland and his noxious idea of getting a first-class man out from England could be swept together into limbo.

"What's the betting about to-night?" asked the Chief Justice, as in one of his restless turns the brooding politician passed near.

"We reckon to beat him by five," answered Coxon.

"Unless any of your men turn tail, that is? I hear Fenton's very wobbly—says he daren't show his face in the North-east Ward if he throws Medland over."

"Oh, he's all right."

"Been promised something?"

"You might allow some of us to have consciences, Chief Justice," said Coxon, with an attempt at geniality.

"Oh, some of you, yes. But I'll pick my men, please," remarked Sir John, with a pleasant smile. "Perry's got a conscience, and Kilshaw—well, Kilshaw's got a gadfly that does instead, and of course, Coxon, I add you to the list."

"Much obliged for your testimonial," said Coxon sourly.

"I add any man I'm talking to, to the list," continued the Chief Justice. "I expect him to do the same by me. But, honestly, I add you even in your absence. You're not a man who puts party ties above everything."

Mr. Coxon darted a suspicious glance at the head of his profession, but the Chief Justice's air was blandly innocent.

"My party's my party," he remarked, "just so long as it carries out my principles. I don't say either party does it perfectly."

"I dare say not; but of course you're right to act with the one that does most for you."

Again the Chief Justice had hit on a somewhat ambiguous expression. Coxon detected a grin on the face of Captain Heseltine, who was sitting near, but he could not hold Sir John's grave face guilty of the Captain's grin.

"I see," remarked the Captain, perhaps in order to cover the retreat of his grin, "that they've discharged the woman who was arrested last night for the murder."

"Really no evidence against her," said the Chief Justice. "But, Heseltine, wasn't this man Benham

the fellow Medland had a sort of shindy with at that flower-show?"

"Yes, he was. Kilshaw seemed to know all about him."

"He was talking to Miss Medland."

"And the Premier had her away from him in no time. Queer start, Sir John?"

"Oh, well, he seems to have been a loose fellow, and I suppose was murdered for the money he had on him. But I mustn't talk about it. I may have to try it."

"Gad! you'll be committing contempt of yourself," suggested the Captain.

"Like that snake that swallows itself, eh?"

"What snake?" asked the Captain, with interest.

"The snake in the story," answered the Chief Justice; and he added in an undertone—"Why can't that fellow sit still?"

Mr. Coxon had wandered to the window again, and was thrumming on the panes. He turned on hearing some one enter. It was Sir Robert Perry.

"Well," he began, "I bring news of the event of the day."

"About to-night?" asked Coxon eagerly.

"To-night! That's not the event of the day. Ministers are a deal commoner than murders. No, last night."

Coxon turned away disappointed.

"The murder!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Don't talk to me about it, Perry," the Chief Justice requested, opening a paper in front of his face. He did not, however, withdraw out of earshot.

"They've got a sort of a clew. A wretched hobbledehoy of a fellow, something in the book-seller's

shop at the corner of Kettle Street, has come with a rigmarole about a society that he and a few more belonged to, including this François Gaspard, who is missing. He protests that the thing was legal, and all that—only a Radical inner ring—but he says that at the last meeting this fellow was dropping hints about putting somebody out of the way. Dyer—that's the lad's name—swears the rest of them disowned him and said they'd have nothing to do with it, and hoped he'd given up the idea."

"I suppose he's in a blue funk?" asked the Captain.

"He is no doubt alarmed," said Sir Robert. "He gave the police the names of the rest of their precious society, and, oddly enough, Ned Evans of the House—you know him, Coxon?—was one."

"Heard such an awful lot of debates, poor chap," observed Captain Heseltine.

"Well, they went to Evans's and collared him. For a time he stuck out that he knew nothing about it, but they threatened him with heaven knows what, and at last he confessed to having seen this Gaspard in company with the murdered man in Digby Square a little before twelve on the night."

"By Jove! That's awkward!" said the Captain.

Coxon showed more interest now, and remarked,

"Why, Gaspard was one of Medland's organisers. I saw him with both Medland and Norburn on Saturday."

"I don't suppose they were planning to murder this Benham. Indeed, I don't see that the thing can have been political at all. What did it matter whether Benham lived or died?"

"I don't see that it did, except to Benham," assented the Captain. "But what's become of Gaspard?"

"Ah, that they don't know. He's supposed to have taken ship, and they've cabled to search all ships that left the port that morning."

"He'll find the man in blue—or the local equivalent—on the wharf," said the Captain. "Rather a jar that, Sir Robert, when you're in from a voyage. What are they doing now?"

"Well, the Superintendent said they were going to have a thorough search through the dead man's lodgings, to see if they could find out anything about him which would throw light on the motive. The police don't think much of the political theory of the crime."

"Dashed nonsense, *I* should think," said the Captain, and he sauntered off to play billiards.

"That young man," said the Chief Justice, "is really not a fool, though he does his best to look like one."

"That queer conduct seems to me rather common in young men at home. I noticed it when I was over."

"Is it meant to imply independent means?"

"I dare say that idea may be dormant under it somewhere. My wife says the girls like it."

"Then your wife, Perry, is a traitor to her sex to make such confessions. Besides, they didn't in my time."

"Come, you know, you're a forlorn bachelor. What can you know about it?"

"Bachelors, Perry, are the men who know. Which gathers most knowledge from a vivisection, the attentive student or the writhing frog?"

"The operator, most of all."

"Doubtless."

"And that's the woman. Therefore, Oakapple, you're wrong and my wife's right."

"The deuce!" said the Chief Justice. "I wonder how I ever got any briefs."

In the afternoon, when these idlers had one and all set out for the Legislative Assembly, some to work, others still to idle, Mr. Kilshaw felt interest enough in the fate of his late henchman to drop in at the police office on his way to the same destination. He was well known, and no one objected to his walking in and making for the door of the Superintendent's room. An officer to whom he spoke told him that Ned Evans was in custody, and that it was rumoured that some startling discoveries had been made at Benham's lodgings.

"Indeed, sir," said the man, "I believe the Superintendent wished to see you."

"Ah, I dare say," said Kilshaw. "Tell him I'm here."

When he was ushered into the inner room, the Superintendent confirmed the officer's surmise.

"I was going to send a message to ask you to step round, sir," he remarked.

"Here I am, but don't be long. I don't want to miss the Premier's speech."

"Mr. Medland speaking to-day?"

"Of course. It's a great day with us at the House."

"I think it looks like being a great day all round. Well, Mr. Kilshaw, you told me you knew the deceased."

"Yes, I knew Benham."

"Benyon," corrected the Superintendent.

"Yes, that was his real name," assented Kilshaw.

"At his lodgings there was found a packet. That's the wrapper," and he handed a piece of brown paper to Kilshaw.

"In case," Kilshaw read, "of my death or disappearance, please deliver this parcel to Mr. Kilshaw, Legislative Assembly, Kirton."

"I'm sorry to say, sir," said the Superintendent, "that the detective sergeant conducting the search took upon him to open this packet in the presence of one or two persons. It ought to have been opened by no one but——"

"Myself."

"Pardon me, but myself," said the Superintendent, with a slight smile. "Owing to the inexcusable blunder, I'm afraid something about what it contains may leak out prematurely. Those pests, the reporters, are everywhere; you can't keep 'em out."

"Well, what does it contain?" asked Kilshaw. He was annoyed at this unsought publicity, but he saw at once that he must show no sign of vexation.

"That, for one thing," and the Superintendent handed Kilshaw a photograph of two persons, a young woman and a young man. "Look at the back," he added.

Kilshaw looked, and read—"My wife and M."

"That's the deceased's handwriting?"

"Yes."

"And you know the persons?"

"I've no doubt about them. It's the Premier—and—and Mrs. Medland."

"Exactly. Now read this," and he gave him

the copy of a certificate of marriage between George Benyon and Margaret Aspland.

"Quite so," nodded Kilshaw.

"And this."

Kilshaw took the slip of newspaper, old and yellow. It contained a few lines, briefly recording that Mrs. Benyon had left her home secretly by night, in her husband's absence, and could not be found.

Kilshaw nodded again.

"It doesn't surprise me," he said. "I knew all this. I was in Mr. Benyon's confidence."

"Perhaps you can tell us how he lived?" hazarded the Superintendent, with a shrewd look.

Mr. Kilshaw looked doubtful.

"The inquest is fixed for to-morrow. The more we know now, the less it will be necessary to protract it."

"I have been helping him lately," admitted Kilshaw; and he added, "Look here, Superintendent, I don't want that more talked about than necessary."

"You needn't say a word to me now unless you like, sir; but I only want to make things as comfortable as I can. You see, the coroner is bound to look into it a bit. Had you given him money lately?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

Kilshaw leant forward and answered, almost in a whisper,

"Five hundred on Friday night," and in spite of himself he avoided the Superintendent's shrewd eye. But that officer's business was not to pass moral judgments. Law is one thing, morality another.

"Then the thing's as plain as a pikestaff. This Gaspard got to know about the money, and murdered him to get it. We needn't look further for a motive."

"I suppose all this will have to come out? I wonder if Gaspard knew who Benham was?"

"It's not necessary to suppose that, unless we believe all Evans says. Certainly, if we trust Evans, Gaspard hinted designs on some one before he could have known Benyon had this money. Could he have known he was going to have it?"

"Benyon may have told him I had promised to help him."

"Well, sir, we must see about that. We shall want you at the inquest, sir."

"I suppose you will, confound you! And I should think you'd want a greater man than I am, too."

The Superintendent looked grave.

"I am going up to try and see the Premier at the House to-day," he said. "I think we shall have to trouble him. You see, he knew Gaspard as well as the deceased."

"I'll give you a lift. You can keep out of the way till he's at leisure."

At this moment one of the police entered, and handed the Superintendent a copy of the *Evening Mail.*

"It's as you feared, sir," he remarked as he went out.

The Superintendent opened the paper, looked at it for an instant, and then indicated a passage with his forefinger.

"It is rumoured," read Mr. Kilshaw, "that certain very startling facts have come to light regard-

ing the identity of the deceased man Benham, and that the name of a very prominent politician, now holding an exalted office, is likely to be introduced into the case. As the matter will be public property to-morrow, we may be allowed to state that trustworthy reports point to the fact of the Premier being in a position to give some important information as to the past life of the deceased. It is said that a photograph of two persons, one of whom is Mr. Medland, has been discovered among the papers at Mr. Benham's (or we should say Benyon's) lodgings. Further developments of this strange affair will be awaited with interest."

"I wish," commented the Superintendent grimly, "that my men could keep a secret as well as their man can sniff one out."

But Mr. Kilshaw was too excited to listen.

"By Jove," he cried, "the news'll be at the House by now! Come along, man, come along!"

And, as they went, they read the rest; for the paper had it all—even a copy of that marriage certificate.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ORATOR'S RIVAL

The House was crowded, and every gallery full. Lady Eynesford and Eleanor Scaife, attended by Captain Heseltine, occupied their appointed seats; the members of the Legislative Council overflowed from their proper pen and mingled with humbler folk in the public galleries; reporters wrote furiously, and an endless line of boys bearing their slips came and went. The great hour had arrived: the battle-field was reached at last. Sir Robert Perry sat and smiled; Puttock played with the hair chain that wandered across his broad waistcoat; Coxon restlessly bit his nails; Norburn's face was pale with excitement, and he twisted his hands in his lap; the determined partisans cheered or groaned; the waverers looked important and felt unhappy; all eyes were steadily fixed on the Premier, and all ears intent on his words.

For the moment he had forgotten everything but the fight he was fighting. No thought of the wretched Benham, who lay dead, no thought of his daughter, who watched him as he spoke, no thought of Alicia Derosne, who stayed away that she might not see him, crossed his brain now, or turned his ideas from the task before him. It was no ordinary speech, and no ordinary occasion. He spoke only to five men out of all his audience—the rest were his, or were beyond the power of his charm; on those five important-looking, unhappy-feeling men he bent every effort of his will, and played every

device of his mind and his tongue. Now and then he distantly threatened them, oftener he made as though to convince their cool judgment; again he would invoke the sentiment of old alliance in them, or stir their pity for the men whose cause he pleaded. Once he flashed out in bitter mockery at Coxon, then jested in mild irony at Puttock and his "rich man's revolution." Returning to his text, he minutely dissected his own measure, insisting on its promise, extenuating its fancied danger, claiming for it the merits of a courageous and well-conceived scheme. Through all the changes that he rang, he was heard with close attention, broken only by demonstrations of approval or of dissent. At last one of his periods extorted a cheer from a waverer. It acted on him as a spur to fresh exertions. He raised his voice till it filled the chamber, and began his last and most elaborate appeal.

Suddenly a change came over his hearers. The breathless silence of engrossed attention gave place to a subdued stir; whispers were heard here and there. Men were handing a newspaper about, accompanying its transfer with meaning looks. He was not surprised, for members made no scruple of reading their papers or writing their letters in the House, but he was vexed to see that he had not gripped them closer. He went on, but that ever-circulating paper had half his attention now. He noticed Kilshaw come in with it and press it on Sir Robert's notice. Sir Robert at first refused, but when Kilshaw urged, he read and glanced up at him, so Medland thought, with a look of sadness. Coxon had got a paper now, and left biting his nails to pore over it; he passed it to Puttock, and the fat man bulged his cheeks in seeming wonder.

Even his waverer, the one who had cheered, was deep in it. Only Norburn was unconscious of it. And, when they had read, they all looked at him again, not as they had looked before, but, it seemed to him, with a curious wonder, half mocking, half pitying, as one looks at a man who does not know the thing that touches him most nearly. He glanced up at the galleries : there too was the ubiquitous sheet ; the Chief Justice and the President of the Legislative Council were cheek by jowl over it, and it fell lightly from Lady Eynesford's slim fingers, to be caught at eagerly by Eleanor Scaife.

"What is it?" he whispered impatiently to Norburn; but his absorbed disciple only bewilderedly murmured "What?" and the Premier could not pause to tell him.

Now followed what Sir Robert maintained was the greatest feat of oratory he had ever witnessed. Gathering his wandering wits together, Medland plunged again whole-heartedly into his speech, and slowly, gradually, almost, it seemed, step by step and man by man, he won back the thoughts of his audience. He wrestled with that strange paper rival and overthrew it. Man after man dropped it; its course was stayed; it fell underfoot or fluttered idly down the gangways. The nods ceased, the whispers were hushed, the stir fell and rose no more. Once again he had them, and, inspired by that knowledge, the surest spur of eloquence, there rang from his lips the last burning words, the picture of the vision that ruled his life, the hope for the days that he might not see.

"Believe!" he cried, in passionate entreaty, "believe, and your sons shall surely see!"

He sank in his seat, and the last echo of his reso-

nant voice died away. First came silence, and then a thunder of applause. Men stood up and waved what they had in their hands, hats or handkerchiefs or papers; women sat with their eyes still on him, or, with a gasp, leant back and closed their lids. He sat with his head sunk on his breast, till the tumult died away. No one rose. The Speaker looked round once and again. Could it be that no one—? Slowly he began to rise. The movement caught Sir Robert's attention: he signed to Puttock, who sprang heavily to his feet. Puttock was no favourite as a speaker, and generally his rising was a signal for the House to thin. He began his speech with his stolid deliberation. Not a man stirred. They waited for something still.

"And now," whispered Medland to the Treasurer, who sat by him, "let's see what it was in that infernal paper."

The Treasurer handed him what he asked.

"You ought to see it," he whispered back.

Mr. Puttock's voice droned on, and his sheaf of notes rustled in his hand. No one looked at him or listened to him. Their eyes were still on Medland. The Premier read—it seemed so slowly—put the paper down, and gazed first up at the ceiling; then he glanced round, and found all the attentive eyes on him: he smiled—it was just a visible smile, no more—and his head fell again on his breast, while his hand idly twisted a button on his coat.

The show was over, or had never come, and the deferred rush to the doors began. They almost tumbled over one another now in their haste to reach where their tongues could play freely. Kilshaw and Perry, the Treasurer and the waverers, all slipped out, and Norburn, knowing nothing but

simply wearied of Puttock, followed them. Scarce twenty were left in the House, and the galleries had poured half their contents into the great room which served for a lobby outside. There the talk ran swift and eager. The very name of "Benyon" was enough for many, who remembered that it had always been said to be the maiden name of Medland's wife. Could any one doubt who the other person in that strangely revealed photograph was, or fail to guess the relation between the man they had been listening to and the man who was dead? A few had known Benyon, more Gaspard, all Medland—the three figures of this drama; many remembered the fourth, the central character, who had not tarried for the end of it: the man was rare who did not spend a thought on the bright girl, whose face was so familiar in these walls, and who must be dragged into it. Where was she? asked one. She was gone. Norburn, with rapid instinct, as soon as he had read, had run to her and forced her to go home. He was back from escorting her now, and walked up and down with hands behind him, speaking to no one among all the busily babbling throng.

The waverers stood in a little group by themselves, talking earnestly in undertones, while men wondered whether the paper would undo what the speech had done, and whether the Premier's words had won a victory, only for his deeds to leap to light and rob it from him again.

Inside, the debate lagged on, surely the dullest, emptiest, most neglected debate that had ever decided the fate of a Government. The men who had been set down to speak came in and spoke and went out again; a House was kept, but with little

to spare. Sir Robert went in and took his place, opposite Medland, who never stirred through all the hours. Presently Sir Robert wrote a note, twisted it, and flung it to the Premier. "A splendid performance of yours, *mes compliments*," it said, and, when Medland looked across to acknowledge it, Sir Robert smiled kindly, and nodded his silver head, and the Premier answered him with a glad gleam in his deep-set eyes. These two men, who were always fighting, knew one another, and liked one another for what they knew. And this little episode done, Sir Robert rose and pricked and pinked the Premier's points, making sharp fun of his heroics, and weightily criticising his proposals. Now the House did fill a little, for after all the debate was important, and the hour of the division drew near; and when the question was put and the bell rang, nearly half the House trooped out with virtuous air to join the other half, persistently gossiping in the lobby, and, with them, decide the fateful question.

One more strange thing was to happen at that sitting.

It was not strange that the Government were beaten by three votes, that only one of those wavering men voted with his old party at last, but it was strange that when this result was announced, and Medland's followers settled sturdily in their seats to endure the celebration of the triumph, the celebration did not come. There was hardly a cheer, and Medland himself, whom the result seemed hardly to have roused, woke with a start to the unwonted silence. It struck to his heart: it seemed like a tribute of respect to a dead enemy. But he rose and briefly said that on the next day

an announcement of the Government's intentions would be made by himself—he paused here a moment—or one of his colleagues. He sat down again. The sitting was at an end, and the House adjourned. Members began to go out, but, as the Premier rose, they drew back and left a path for him down the middle of the House. As he went, one or two thrust out their hands to him, and one honest fellow shouted in his rough voice—he was a labouring-man member—"You're not done yet, Jimmy!"

The shout touched him, he lifted his head, looked round with a smile, and, just raising again the hat he had put on as he neared the door, took Norburn's arm and passed out of the House.

When Sir Robert followed, he found the Chief Justice waiting for him, and they walked off together. For a long while neither spoke, but at last Sir Robert said peevishly,

"I wish this confounded thing hadn't happened. It spoils our win."

The Chief Justice nodded, and whistled a bar or two of some sad ditty.

"I'm glad she's dead, poor soul, Perry," he said.

"There's the girl," said Sir Robert.

"Ay, there's the girl."

They did not speak again till they were just parting, when the Chief Justice broke out,

"Why the deuce couldn't the fellow take his beastly photograph with him?"

"It's very absurd," answered Sir Robert, "but I feel just the same about it."

"I'm hanged if you're not a gentleman, Perry," said the Chief Justice, and he hastened away, blowing his nose.

CHAPTER XXIV

THREE AGAINST THE WORLD

THOUGH the House had risen early that evening, the Central Club sat very late. The smoking-room was crowded, and tongues wagged briskly. Every man had a hare to hunt; no one lacked irrefragable arguments to prove what must happen; no one knew exactly what was going to happen. The elder men gathered round Puttock and Jewell, and listened to a demonstration that the Premier's public life was at an end; the younger rallied Coxon, whose premature stateliness sometimes invited this treatment, dubbing him "Kingmaker Coxon," and hilariously repudiating the idea that he did not enjoy the title. Captain Heseltine dropped in about eleven; cross-questioning drew from him the news that communications had passed, informal communications, he insisted, from the Governor to Sir Robert, as well as to the Premier.

"In fact," he said, "poor old Flemyng's cutting up and down all over the place. Glad it's his night on duty."

Presently Mr. Flemyng himself appeared, clamorous for cigars and drink, but mighty discreet and vexatiously reticent. Yes, he had taken a letter to Medland; yes, and another to Perry; no, he had no idea what the missives were about. He believed Medland was to see the Governor to-morrow, but it was beyond him to conjecture the precise object of the interview. Was it resigna-

tion or dissolution? Really, he knew no more than that waiter—and so forth; very likely his ignorance was real, but he diffused an atmosphere of suppressed knowledge which whetted the curiosity of his audience to the sharpest edge.

A messenger entered and delivered a note to Puttock and another to Coxon. The two compared their notes for a moment, and went out together. The arguments rose furiously again, some maintaining that Medland must disappear altogether, others vehemently denying it, a third party preferring to await the disclosures at the inquest before committing themselves to an opinion. An hour passed; the noise in the streets began to abate, and the clock of the Roman Catholic cathedral hard by struck twelve. Captain Heseltine yawned, stretched, and rose to his feet.

"Come along, Flemyng," he said. "The show's over for to-night."

He seemed to express the general feeling, but men were reluctant to acknowledge so disappointing a conclusion, and the preparations for departure were slow and lingering. They had not fairly begun before Mr. Kilshaw's entrance abruptly checked them. Instantly he became the centre of a crowd.

"Now, Kilshaw," they cried, "you know all about it. Oh, come now! Of course you do! Secret? Nonsense! Out with it!" and one or two of his intimates added imploringly, "Don't be an ass, Kilshaw."

Kilshaw flung himself into a chair.

"They resign," he said.

"At once?"

"Yes. Perry's to be sent for. Medland, I'm

told, insists on going. For my own part, I think he's right."

"Of course," said somebody sapiently, "he doesn't want to dissolve with this affair hanging over him."

"It comes to the same thing," observed Kilshaw. "Perry will dissolve; the Governor has promised to do it, if he likes."

"Perry dissolve!"

"Yes," nodded Kilshaw. "You see—" He paused and added, "Our present position isn't very independent."

Everybody understood what he hinted. Sir Robert did not care to depend on the will of Coxon and his seceders.

"And what about Coxon and Puttock?" was the next question.

"Haven't I been indiscreet enough?"

"Well, what are you going to do yourself?"

"My duty," answered Mr. Kilshaw, with a smile, and the throng, failing to extract any more from him, did at last set about the task of getting home to bed in good earnest.

They could rest sooner than the man who occupied so much of their interest. It had been a busy evening for the defeated Minister; he had colleagues to see, letters to write, messages to send, conferences to hold. No doubt there was much to do, and yet Norburn, who watched him closely, doubted whether he did not make work for himself, perhaps as a means of distraction, perhaps as a device for postponing an interview with his daughter. He had seen her for a minute when he came in, and told her he would tell her all there was to tell some time that night; but the moment for it

was slow in coming. Norburn had been struck with Daisy's composure. She had seen the *Evening Mail*, and, without attempting to discuss the matter with him, she expressed her conviction that there could be nothing distressing behind the mysterious paragraph. Norburn did not know what to say to her. He felt that in a case of this sort a girl's mind was a closed book to him. He had himself, on the way back from the House, heard a brief account of the whole matter from the Premier's lips; it seemed to him, in the light of his ideas and theories, a matter of very little moment. He was of course aware how widely the judgment of many would differ from his, and when his mind was directed to the political aspect of the situation, he acknowledged the gravity of the disclosure. But honestly he could not pretend to think it a thing which should alter or lessen the esteem or love in which Medland's friends held him. And even if the original act were seriously worthy of blame, the lapse of years made present severity as unreasonable as it would be unkind. In vain Medland reminded him that, let the act be as old and long past as it would, the consequences remained.

"What!" Norburn cried, "would any one think the worse of Daisy? The more fools they!" and he laughed cheerfully, adding, "I only wish she'd let me show her I think none the worse of her. Why, it's preposterous, sir!"

"Preposterous or not," answered Medland, "half the people in the place will let her know the difference. I may agree with you—God knows how I should like to be able to!—but there's no blinking the fact. Well, I must tell her."

He recollected telling the same story to the other woman he loved, and he shrank in sudden dread, lest his daughter should say what Alicia had said, "To me it is—horrible!" The words echoed in his brain. "Ah, I can't speak of it," she had cried, and the gesture of her hand as she repelled him lived before his eyes again. Surely Daisy would not do that to him!

"I should be like Lear—without a grievance," he said to himself, with a wry smile. "The very height of tragedy!"

It was near midnight before he put away his work. Norburn had left him alone two hours before, and he rose now, laid down his pipe, and went to look for his daughter in her little sitting-room. His heart was very heavy; he must make her understand now why a man who made love to her should be hastily sent away by his friends, what her father had condemned her to, what manner of man he was; he must seem to destroy or impair the perfect sweetness of memory wherein she held her mother.

He opened the door softly. She was sitting in a large armchair, over a little bit of bright fire; save for gleams suddenly coming and going, as a coal blazed and died down again, the room was in darkness. He walked up to her and knelt by the chair, his head almost on a level with hers.

"Well, Daisy, what are you doing?"

She put out a hand and laid it on his with a gentle pressure.

"I'm thinking," she said. "Do you want a light?"

"No, I like it dark best—best for what I have to say."

Suddenly she threw her arms round his neck, drawing him to her and kissing his face.

"I'd do the same if you'd killed him yourself," she whispered in the extravagance of her love, and kissed him again.

"But, Daisy, you don't know."

"Yes, I do. He told me. He's been here."

"Who?"

"Jack Norburn. He said you would hate telling me, so he did. You mustn't mind, dear, you mustn't mind. Oh, you didn't think it would make any difference to me, dear, did you? What do I care? Mrs. Puttock may care, and Lady Eynesford, and all the rest, but what do I care if I have you and him?"

"Me and him, Daisy?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling boldly. "He's asked me to marry him—just to show he didn't mind—and I think I will, father. We three against the world! What need we care? Father, we'll beat Sir Robert!" and she seized his two hands and laughed.

In vain Medland tried to tell her what he had come to say. Mighty as his relief and joy were, he still felt a burden lay on him. She would not hear.

"Don't you see I'm happy?" she cried. "It can't be your duty to make me unhappy. Jack doesn't mind, I don't mind!" Her voice sank a little and she added, "It can't hurt mother now. Oh, don't be unhappy about it, dear—don't, don't!"

They were standing now, and his arm was about her. Looking up at him, she went on,

"They sha'n't beat us! They sha'n't say they beat us. We three, father!"

He stooped and kissed her. There is love that lies beyond the realm of giving or taking, of harm or good, of wrong, or even of forgiveness. With all his faults, this love he had won from his daughter, and it stood him in stead that night. He drew himself up to his height, and the air of despondency fell from him. The girl's brave love braced him to meet the world again.

"No, by Jove, we're not beat yet, Daisy!" he said, and she kissed him again and laughed softly as she made him sit, and herself sat upon his knee.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRUTH TOO LATE

By four o'clock the next afternoon the Club had gathered ample materials for fresh gossip. The formalities attendant on the change of government, the composition of the new Cabinet, the prospects of the election—these alone would have supplied many hours, and besides them, indeed supplanting them temporarily by virtue of an intenser interest, there was the account of the inquest on Benyon's body. Medland had gone to it, almost direct from his final interview with the Governor, and Kilshaw had been there, fresh from a conference with Perry. The inquiry had ended, as was foreseen directly Ned Evans's evidence was forthcoming, in a verdict of murder against Gaspard; but the interest lay in the course of the investigation, not in its issue. Mr. Duncombe, a famous comedian, who was then on tour in New Lindsey and had been made an honorary member of the Club, smacked his lips over the dramatic moment when the ex-Premier, calmly and in a clear voice, had identified the person in the photograph, declared the deceased man to have been Benyon, and very briefly stated how he had been connected with him in old days.

"The lady," he said, "is Mrs. Benyon. The other figure is that of myself. I had not seen the deceased for many years."

"You were not on terms with him?" asked the

coroner, who, in common with half the listeners, had known the lady as Mrs. Medland.

"No," said Mr. Medland; "I lost sight of him."

"You did not hear from—from any one about him?"

"No."

He gave the dates when he had last seen Benyon in old days. Asked whether he had communicated with him between that date and the dead man's reappearance, he answered,

"Once, about four years ago. I wrote to tell him of that lady's death," and he pointed again to the picture, and went on to tell the details of Benyon's subsequent application to him for a post under Government.

"You refused it?" he was asked.

"Yes, I refused it. I spoke to him once again, when we met on a social occasion. We had a sort of dispute then. I never saw him again to speak to."

"It was all done," said Mr. Duncombe, describing the scene, "in a repressed way that was very effective—to a house that knew the circumstances most effective. And the other fellow—Kilshaw—he gave some sport too. The coroner (they told me he was one of Medland's men, and I noticed he spared Medland all he could) was inclined to be a bit down on Kilshaw. Kilshaw was cool and handy in his answers, but, Lord love you! his game came out pretty plain. A monkey! You don't give a man a monkey unless there's value received! So people saw, and Mr. Kilshaw looked a bit uncomfortable when he caught Medland's eye. He looked at him like that," and Mr. Duncombe

assumed the finest wronged-hero glance in his repertory.

"Oh, come, old chap, I bet he didn't," observed Captain Heseltine. "We've seen him, you know."

Duncombe laughed good-humouredly.

"At any rate he made Kilshaw look a little green, and some of the people behind called out 'Shame!' and got themselves sat upon. Then they had Medland up again and twisted him a bit about his acquaintance with Gaspard; but the coroner didn't seem to think there was anything in it, and they found murder against Gaspard, and rang down the curtain. And when we got outside there was a bit of a rumpus. They hooted Kilshaw and cheered Medland, and yelled like mad when a dashed pretty girl drove up in a pony-cart and carried him off. Altogether it wasn't half bad."

"Glad you enjoyed yourself," observed Captain Heseltine. "If it amuses strangers to see our leading celebrities mixed up in a murder and other distressing affairs, it's the least we can do to see that they get it."

The Captain's facetiousness fell on unappreciative ears. Most of Mr. Duncombe's audience were too alive to the serious side of the matter to enjoy it. To them it was another and a very striking scene in the fight which had long gone on between Medland and Kilshaw, and had taken a fresh and fiercer impetus from the well-remembered day when Medland had spoken his words about Kilshaw and his race-horses. Nobody doubted that Kilshaw had kept this man Benyon, or Benham, as a secret weapon, and that the murder had only made the disclosure come earlier. Kilshaw's repu-

tation suffered somewhat in the minds of the scrupulous, but his partisans would hear of no condemnation. They said, as he had said, that in dealing with a man like Medland it would have been folly not to use the weapons fate, or the foe himself by his own misdeeds, offered. As for the disapprobation of the Kirton mob, they held that in high scorn.

"They'd cheer burglary, if Medland did it," said one.

"Well, he wants to, pretty nearly," added a capitalist.

"But the country will take a very different view. Puttock'll rub it into all his people: *they*'ll not vote for him. What do you say, Coxon?"

"I think we shall beat him badly," said that gentleman, as he rose and went out.

Captain Heseltine soon followed, and was surprised to see Coxon's figure just ahead of him as he entered the gates of Government House.

"Hang the fellow! What does he want here?" asked the Captain.

Mr. Coxon asked for Lady Eynesford. When he entered, she rose with a newspaper in her hand.

"What a shocking, shameful thing this is!" she said. "What a blessing it is that the Government was beaten!"

Coxon acquiesced in both these opinions.

"I never thought well of him," continued the lady. "Now everybody sees him in his true colours. And it's you we have chiefly to thank for our deliverance."

Coxon murmured a modest depreciation of his services, and said,

"I hope Miss Derosne is well?"

Something in his tones brought to his hostess one of those swift fits of repentance that were apt to wait for her whenever she allowed herself to treat this visitor with friendliness. He was so very prompt in responding!

"She is not very well," she answered, rather coldly.

"I—I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing her?"

Mr. Coxon's wishes were fulfilled to the moment. The door opened and Alicia came in. On seeing him she stopped.

"Come in, Alicia," said Lady Eynesford. "Here's Mr. Coxon come to be congratulated."

Coxon stood up with a propitiatory smile.

"How do you do, Mr. Coxon?" said Alicia, giving him a limp hand. "Shall I ring for tea, Mary?"

"They'll bring it. You haven't wished him joy."

"Oh, are you in the new Ministry?"

"I have that honour, Miss Derosne. I hope you are on our side?"

"I don't quite know which side you are on—now," observed Alicia, in slow but distinct tones.

Coxon grew red.

"I—I have joined Sir Robert Perry's ministry," he answered.

"Of course he has, Alicia," interposed Lady Eynesford hastily.

Alicia seated herself on the sofa, remarking as she did so,

"Well, you do change a good deal, don't you?"

"Really, Miss Derosne," he stammered, "I don't understand you."

"Oh, I only mean that you were first with Sir Robert, then with Mr. Medland, and now with Sir Robert again! And presently with Mr. Medland again, I suppose?"

"She doesn't appreciate the political reasons," began Lady Eynesford, with troubled brow and smiling lips; but Coxon, frowning angrily, broke in,

"Not the last, I promise you, anyhow, Miss Derosne."

"What, you think he's finally beaten then?"

"That's not the question. Beaten or not, he is discredited, and no respectable man would act with him."

"We needn't discuss—" began Lady Eynesford again, but this time Alicia was the interrupter. She spoke in a cold, hard way, very unlike her own.

"If he won, you would all be at his feet."

Coxon was justified in being angry at her almost savage scorn of him; regardless of anything except his wrong, he struck back the sharpest blow he could.

"I know some people are very ready to be at his feet," he said, with a sneering smile.

His shaft hit the mark. Alicia flushed and sat speechless. A glance at Lady Eynesford's face told him the scene had lasted too long: he rose and took his leave, paying Alicia the homage of a bow, but not seeking her hand. She took no notice of his salute, and Lady Eynesford only gasped "Good-bye."

The two sat silent for some moments after he had gone; then Lady Eynesford remarked,

"Were you mad, Alicia? See what you laid

yourself open to! Oh, of course a gentleman wouldn't have said it, but you yourself didn't treat him as if he was a gentleman. Really, I can make a great deal of allowance for him. Your manner was inexcusable."

Alicia did not attempt to defend herself.

"You are out of temper," continued her sister-in-law, "and you choose to hit the first person within reach; if you can do that you care nothing for my dignity or your own self-respect. You parade your—your interest in this man——"

"I shall never speak to him again."

"I'm glad to hear it, and, if you come into my drawing-room, I will thank you to behave yourself properly and be civil to my guests," and Lady Eynesford walked out of the room.

Alicia huddled herself in a heap on the sofa, turning her face to the wall. She felt Lady Eynesford's scornful rebuke like the stroke of a whip. She had descended to a vulgar wrangle, and had been worsted in it: the one thing of all which it concerned her to hide had by her own act been opened to the jeer of a stranger; she had violated every rule of good breeding and self-respect. No words — not even Lady Eynesford's — were too strong to describe what she had done. Yet she could not help it; she could not hear a creature like that abuse or condemn a man like Medland—though all that he had said she had said, and more, to Medland himself. She was too miserable to think; she lay with closed eyes and parted lips, breathing quickly, and restlessly moving her limbs in that strange physical discomfort which great unhappiness brings with it.

A footstep roused her; she sat up, hurriedly

smoothing her hair and clutching at a book that lay on the table by her. The intruder was her brother, and fortunately he was too intent on the tidings he brought to notice her confusion.

"Great news, Al!" he cried. "They've offered me Ireland. We shall start home in a month."

"Home in a month?" she echoed.

"Yes. Splendid, isn't it?"

"You're pleased, Willie?"

The Governor was very pleased. He liked the promotion, he liked going home; and finally, pleasant as his stay in New Lindsey had been on the whole, there were features in the present position which made him not sorry to depart.

"I shall just see the elections through, and Perry well started—at least, I suppose it'll be Perry—and then we'll be off. Sha'n't you be glad to see the old home again, Al?"

"It's so sudden," she said. "I shall be sorry to leave here."

"Oh, so shall I—very sorry to leave some of the people too. Still, it's a good thing. Where's Eleanor? I must tell her. I say, Dick gets here to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

The Governor hurried out again, and Alicia returned to the sofa. The knot of her troubles had been rudely cut. Perhaps this summary ending was best. She herself would not, she knew, have had the strength to tear herself away from that place, but if fate tore her—perhaps well and good. Nothing but unhappiness waited there for her; it seemed to her that nothing but unhappiness waited anywhere now; but at least, over at home, she would not have to fear the discovery of her secret,

the secret she herself kept so badly, nor to endure the torture of gossip, hints, and clumsy pity. No one, over at home, would think of Medland; they might just know his name, might perhaps have heard him rumoured for a dangerous man and a vexatious opponent of good Sir Robert. Certainly they would never think of him as the cause of bruising of heart to a young lady in fashionable society. So he would pass out of her life; she would leave him to his busy, strenuous, happy-unhappy life, so full of triumphs and defeats, of ups and downs, of the love of many and the hate of many. Perhaps she, like the rest, would read his name in the *Times* now and then, unless indeed he were utterly vanquished. No, he was not finally beaten. Of that she was sure. His name would be read often in cold print, but the glow of the life he lived would be henceforth unknown to her. She would go back to the old world and the old circle of it. What would happen after that she was too listless to think. It was summed up in negations; and these again melted into one great want, the absence of the man to whom her imagination and her heart blindly and obstinately clung.

Lady Eynesford had left her newspaper, and Alicia found her hand upon it. Taking it up, she read Medland's evidence at the inquest. A sudden revulsion of feeling seized her. Was this the man she was dreaming about, a man who calmly, coolly as though caring nothing, told that story in the face of all the world? Was she never to get rid of the spell he had cast on her before she knew what he really was? For a man like this she had sacrificed her self-respect, bandied insults with a vulgar upstart, and brought on her head a reproach

more fitting for an ill-mannered child. She threw the paper from her and rose to her feet. She would think no more of him ; he might be what he would; he was no fit subject for her thoughts, and he and the place where he lived and all this wretched country deserved nothing better than to be forgotten, resolutely, utterly, soon.

" I am very sorry, Mary," she was saying, ten minutes later ; " I deserved all you said. I don't know what foolishness possessed me. See, I have written and apologised to Mr. Coxon."

And Lady Eynesford kissed her and thanked heaven that they would soon have done with Mr. Coxon and—all the rest.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE UNCLEAN THING

A FEW days later, Mr. Dick Derosne was walking in the Park at noon. He had been down to the Club and found no one there. Everybody except himself was at work: the politicians were scattered all over the colony, conducting their election campaign. Medland himself had gone to his constituency: his seat was very unsafe there, and he was determined to keep it if he could, although, as a precaution, he was also a candidate for the North-east ward of Kirton, where his success was beyond doubt. His friends and his foes had followed him out of town, and the few who were left were busy in the capital itself. Such men as these when at the Club would talk of nothing but the crisis, and, after he had heard all there was to hear about the Benyon affair, the crisis began to bore Dick. After all, it mattered very little to him; he would be out of it all in a month, and the Medlands were not, when he came to think of it, people of great importance. Why, the Grangers had never heard of them! Decidedly, he had had enough and to spare of the Medlands.

Nevertheless, he was to have a little more of them, for at this instant he saw Daisy Medland approaching him. Escape was impossible, and Dick had the grace to shrink from appearing to avoid her.

"The deuce!" he thought, "this is awkward. I hope she won't—" He raised his hat with elaborate politeness.

Daisy stopped and greeted him with much effusion and without any embarrassment. Dick thought that odd.

"I was afraid," she said, "we were not going to see you again before you disappeared finally with the Governor."

"Oh, I came back just to settle things up. I hope you are all right, Miss Medland?"

"Yes, thank you. Did you have a pleasant trip?"

"Yes, very," he answered, wondering if she knew of his engagement.

"We missed you very much," she went on.

"Awfully kind of you to say so."

"You started so suddenly."

"Oh, well—yes, I suppose I did. It just struck me I ought to see Australia."

"How funny!" she exclaimed, with a little laugh.

"Why funny?" asked Dick, rather stiffly.

"I mean that it should strike you just like that. However, it was very lucky, wasn't it?"

"You mean I——"

"Yes, I mean you—" said Daisy, who had no intention of saving Dick from any floundering that might befall him. Mercy is all very well, but give us justice sometimes.

"You heard of my—my engagement?"

"I saw it in the papers. A Miss Granger, isn't it?"

"*A* Miss Granger!" thought Dick. Everybody knew the Grangers.

"I'm sure I congratulate you. You lost no time, Mr. Derosne."

Dick stammered that it was an old acquaintance renewed.

"Oh, then you've been in love with her a long while?" asked Daisy, with a curiosity apparently very innocent.

"Not exactly that."

"Then you did fall in love very quickly?"

"Well, I suppose I did," admitted Dick, as if he were rather ashamed of himself.

"Oh, I mustn't blame you," said Daisy, with a pensive sigh.

Dick, on the look-out for a hint of suppressed suffering, saw what he looked for. She was taking it very well, and it was his duty to say something nice. Moreover, Daisy Medland was looking extremely pretty, and that fact alone, in Dick's view, justified and indeed necessitated the saying of something nice. Violet Granger was leagues away, and a touch of romance could not disquiet or hurt her.

"Indeed I am anxious to hear that you don't," he said, accompanying his remark with a glance of pathetic anxiety.

"Why should I?" she asked.

This simple question placed Dick in a difficulty, and he was glad when she went on without waiting for an answer.

"Indeed I should have no right to. Love is sudden and—and beyond our control, isn't it?"

"And yet," said Dick, "a man is bound to consider so many things."

"I was thinking of a girl's love. She just gives it and thinks of nothing. Doesn't she?" and she looked at him with an appeal to his experience in her eyes.

"Does she?" said Dick, who began to feel uncomfortable.

"And when she has once given it, she never changes."

If this last remark were a generalisation, it was certainly an audacious one, but Dick was thinking only of a personal application. Daisy's words, as he understood their meaning, were working on the better nature which lay below his frivolity. He began to suffer genuine shame and remorse at the idea that he had caused suffering—lasting pain—to this poor unsophisticated child who had loved him so readily. Moved by this honourable, if tardy, compunction, he ejaculated,

"Oh, don't say that, Miss Medland. I never thought—I—I mean, surely you don't mean—?" And then he came to a dead stop for a moment; only to start abruptly again the next, with—"It would spoil my happiness, if I thought—you don't really mean it, do you? I don't know how I should ask you to forgive me, if you do."

Daisy's plot (which it is not sought to justify) had been crowned with success. A mischievous smile replaced her innocent expression.

"What do you mean, Mr. Derosne? Forgive you? I was speaking of my own feelings."

"Yes, so—so I understood, and I wanted to say that I hoped you wouldn't think I had been incon-sid——"

"What does it matter to me, how long or how short your wooing is? They say lovers are self-centred, but really I think you're the worst I ever met. I must confess I wasn't thinking of you, Mr. Derosne."

"What?" exclaimed Dick.

"Is it possible you haven't heard of my engagement?" she asked in the sweetest tone.

"Your——"

"Yes—to Mr. Norburn," and she watched the effect with obvious pleasure.

Dick pulled himself together. She had made a fool of him; that was pretty clear now it was too late to help it.

"I hadn't heard. I congratulate you," he said, stiffly and awkwardly.

"Thanks. Of course that was what I meant when I said my feelings could never change. How odd you must have thought it of me, if you didn't know!"

"Well, I—I didn't quite understand."

"You seemed puzzled and I couldn't understand why. We were both thinking of ourselves too much, I suppose!"

"May I ask if you have been engaged long?"

"Oh, not actually engaged very long, but, like yours, it's been an old acquaintance, and—if you won't betray me—perhaps a little more for ever so long."

Dick was not quite sure whether he believed the lady or not. He ought to have wished to believe her; as a fact, he was extremely reluctant to do so, but Daisy's look was so candid and at the same time so naturally shy, in making her little avowal, that he was almost convinced that the semi-tragedy of their parting scene a few weeks before had been all acting on her side. Alicia could have undeceived him, but, for reasons tolerably obvious, Dick did not rehearse this interview to Alicia or to any one else.

"Ah! here comes Mr. Norburn!" cried Daisy, rosy with delight. "You must congratulate one another."

This very hollow ceremony was duly performed, and Dick left the lovers together. In fact he may be said to have made his exit in a somewhat shamefaced manner. Fortune put him at a disadvantage in that his partner was far away, while Daisy stood triumphant by the side of hers and watched him.

"Upon my honour," he exclaimed, hitting viciously at a flower, "I believe she was humbugging me all the time!" And from that day to this he thinks Miss Medland a flirt, and is very glad, for that among other weighty reasons, that he had nothing more to do with her.

Her behaviour toward Dick Derosne was fairly typical of Daisy Medland's attitude toward the world at large at this time. She made the mistake, natural enough, of being defiant, of emphasising outwardly an indifference that she did not feel, of anticipating slights and being ready to resent slurs which were never intended or inflicted. There are so many people in the world who want only an excuse for being kind, but yet do want that, and who are ready to give much, but must be asked. There were many among the upper circles of Kirton society who would have been ready enough to act a friendly part, to overlook much, to play protector to the girl, and do a favour to a man who had been and might again be powerful; but they too needed to be asked—not of course in words, but by a hint of gratitude waiting for them, a touch of deference, some kind of appeal from the loneliness and desolation of a doubtful position to the comfortable regions of unaspersed respectability. They could not help feeling that Daisy, though by no fault of hers, was yet one who should ask and accept as favours what among equals are

no more than courtesies. The knowledge of this point of view drove Daisy into strong revolt against it: she was more, not less, offhand than of yore; more, not less, ready to ignore people with whom she was not in sympathy; more, not less, unscrupulous in outraging the small conventions of society. And, unfortunately, Norburn was a man to encourage instead of discourage her in this course, for conventions and respectability had always been a red rag to him. In the result the isolation of the Medland household from most of the families of their own level in the town, and from all of a higher, if there were any such, grew from day to day, until it seemed that Daisy's "We three against the world!" was to come true so far as the world meant the social circle of their neighbours. Medland himself was too engrossed with larger matters to note the progress of this outlawry: when he did for a moment turn his thoughts from the campaign he was engrossed with, there was only one face in Kirton society whose countenance or aversion troubled him: and that one was sternly and irrevocably turned away.

Thus Daisy, though she might be cheered in the streets, and though she bore herself with exuberant gaiety out of doors, passed lonely evenings, especially when Norburn left her to help in the country elections. The Chief Justice had been to see her once, and Lady Perry had left a card, but she was almost always alone, and then the exuberant gaiety would evaporate. One evening about half-past nine, she was sitting alone, wishing her father or her lover would come back to her, when there was a knock at the door. Alicia Derosne came in, with a hasty, almost furtive, step.

"You are alone, aren't you? I saw Mr. Medland was away."

"Yes, I am alone," said Daisy, doubtful whether to put on her armour or not.

"Oh, Daisy, I've never been able to come and wish you joy yet. I wouldn't do it by letter. I'm so glad. You are happy, aren't you?" and she took Daisy's two hands and kissed her.

"Yes, I am very happy. It's sweet of you to come. How did you manage it?"

Neither cared to pretend that Lady Eynesford would approve of such a visit.

"Oh, I slipped out," said Alicia, nestling beside her friend. "Poor child! What things you have been through! Still—you have Mr. Norburn."

"Yes; with him and father I really don't mind." She paused, and then there slipped out, in lower tone, a tell-tale "Much."

Alicia answered it with a caress.

"How brave you are!" she said. "Does—does he mind?"

"Mr. Norburn?"

"I meant your father."

"He has no time to mind now. We are fighting," said Daisy.

"Ah, a man can fight, can't he?"

"Oh, but so can a girl. I'm fighting too."

"I've no one to fight for."

Daisy turned quickly toward her: there were tears in her eyes. Surely she was a sorry comforter: perhaps she had come as much seeking as to bring comfort.

"You don't look very happy," remarked Daisy.

"Don't talk about me, Daisy. It will never

make the least difference between you and me. I wanted to tell you. You know we are going? You must write to me, dear, and some day you and Mr. Norburn must come to England and stay with me, when I have my own house. Promise now! I—I don't want to lose you quite."

"Of course I will write, but you won't care for our news when you are gone."

"Indeed I shall care to hear of you and Mr. Norburn, and—of your father too."

"Will you really? Oh, then I shall have lots to say. Father always gives one lots to say about him," said Daisy proudly.

"Tell him he mustn't despair."

"From you?"

"No, no. From you."

"Oh, of course I tell him that."

"I—I mustn't send him any message."

"You're not against him too, are you, Alicia?"

"I'm not much against him," whispered Alicia. "And, if any one says I am, Daisy, don't believe it of me. I must go, dear. I shall be missed. I shall come again."

"Do," said Daisy. "I'm just a little lonely now," and she nearly broke down, as Alicia took her in her arms.

Thus they stood when Medland, suddenly returned on an urgent matter, opened the door, and, standing, looked at them for a moment. Alicia seemed to feel his presence; with a start she looked up. He crossed the room, holding out his hand.

"It is like you," he said simply.

She shook her head.

"I—I did not know you were here."

"I am not supposed to be," he answered, kissing his daughter.

Alicia hastily said good-bye, Medland not trying to detain her. But he signed to Daisy to stay in the room and escorted Alicia downstairs.

At the hall door he kept her, laying his hand on the door.

"Yes, that was very kind. Poor child! She wants friends."

"I can do very little—I——"

"Yes, I know. And you are going?"

"Yes, in three weeks."

He was silent for a moment: then he looked in her eyes.

"You know the worst now," he said in a low voice.

"Yes," she murmured, trying to escape his gaze.

"And you still say what you said before?"

"I—I say nothing. I must go."

"Very likely we shall never speak alone again as long as we live—perhaps never at all."

"Isn't it best?" she murmured.

"Best!" he echoed. "You are happy in it then?"

"I happy! Ah!"

He could not miss the meaning of her tone.

"Most people," he said, "would call me a criminal for what I am going to say—and you a fool if you listen. Alicia, will you face it all and come to me?" and he drew nearer to her. "I know what I ask—but I know too what I have to give."

"Let me go," she gasped, as though his hand were on her.

"Can you do it?" he asked. "I needn't tell you to think what it means."

"I don't mind that," she broke out suddenly. "Don't think it's that. I would face all that if—if I could——"

"Trust me?"

She bowed her head.

"You can never trust me again?"

"Why make me say it?"

"But it is so?"

Again she bowed her head.

"It is still—horrible?"

He drew back and opened the door, letting in the cool night air.

"Good-bye," he said. "It's your last word?"

She seemed to sway toward him and away again.

"I sha'n't ask again," he went on, still in that calm, low voice. "I shall accept what you say now. You think me—unclean?"

Her silence was answer as she stepped out into the path.

"For the last time!"

"I can't," she said, with a sob. "You—you know why."

"And yet, if you loved me!"

"Loved you!" she cried. "But no, no, no!" and she turned and disappeared in the gloom.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DECISION OF THE ORACLE

"I SEE from Tomes," observed Eleanor Scaife to the Chief Justice, as he handed her a cup of tea, "that all the elections are on the same day in New Lindsey."

"They are," he answered. "A good thing, don't you think?"

"But if a man wants to vote in two places?"

"Then it's kind to prevent him, because if he does it he's sent to prison."

"Oh! And when do the results appear?"

"Here at Kirton? Oh, any time between nine and midnight, or an hour later. One or two are left over as a rule. They're published at the Town-hall, and it's generally rather a lively scene."

"And how is it going to go?"

The Chief Justice lowered his voice.

"Medland will be beaten. He can't believe it and his friends won't, but he'll be beaten badly all over the country, except here in Kirton. Kirton he'll carry pretty solid, but that won't be enough."

"How many seats are there here?"

"Oh, here and in this district, which is under Kirton influence, about two-and-twenty, and he ought to get eighteen or nineteen of them; but what's that out of eighty members?"

"And what's the reason? Merely his policy or——?"

"Well, his policy a good deal. All the manu-

facturers and capitalists are straining every nerve to give him such a thrashing as will keep him out for years, and they spare neither time nor money nor hard words. I don't blame 'em. And then, of course, the other thing counts. It hits him where he was strong—among the religious folk. Puttock's their special man, and Puttock never lets it alone."

"What, do they talk about it in public?"

"Well, I should rather think they did. Oh, we fight with the gloves off in New Lindsey."

"After all, if it's a matter that ought to count, it ought to be talked about," remarked Miss Scaife thoughtfully.

"I suppose so," answered Sir John doubtfully; "only it always sounds a little mean, you know."

Eleanor did not attempt to reconcile this seeming contradiction.

"So Sir Robert will be back? Well, Mary will be delighted."

"It doesn't so much matter to her, as you're going."

"No, but she will. For my own part, I like Sir Robert, but his Government rather lacks variety, doesn't it? It's not exactly thrilling."

"That's very high praise."

"I hardly meant it to be," laughed Eleanor. "However, as you say, it doesn't matter much now to us."

"No, nor to me."

"Then it's true you're resigning?"

"Yes, in a few weeks. I'm just holding on to——"

"See this crisis through, I suppose?"

"Oh dear, no. The crisis, as you call it, Miss

Scaife, don't matter to me—nor I to it. I'm holding on to complete another year's service and get fifty pound more pension."

"You're very practical, Sir John."

"High praise again!"

"Perhaps hardly meant again!"

"I'm sure Lady Eynesford teaches her household the value of practicality."

"Well, Mary is practical; and I suppose Dick must be called so now—Miss Granger's an excellent match. Oh, I suppose we all pass muster pretty well, except Alicia."

"Miss Derosne is a visionary?"

"A little bit of one, I often tell her."

"It's an added grace in a pretty girl," said Sir John.

"I said *I* was practical," observed Miss Scaife.

"But you need no added graces," he returned, smiling.

"A palpable evasion!"

Some days had passed since Medland's interview with Alicia. He had left Kirton the morning after, and, as the day of the election drew nearer and nearer, news of him came from all parts of the colony. Wherever the opposition was strongest and hostility most bitter, he flung himself into the fray; at moments it seemed as though he would wrest victory from an adverse fate, but when he went away, the effect of his presence gradually evaporated, and his work was half undone before he had been gone a day. In the Governor's household the accounts of his doings were allowed to pass in silence; they had become a forbidden topic. Alicia might devour them in solitude, and the Governor himself watch them with an almost sym-

pathetic interest; Lady Eynesford ignored them altogether, and seemed not to see Medland's colours and his watchwords that glared at her in the streets of Kirton. Sir Robert was quietly confident, and Kilshaw fiercely exultant; Medland's friends hoped against hope, and, secure of their position in the capital, flooded the country with eager missionaries. Passion ran high, and there had been one or two disturbing incidents. Sir Robert was refused a hearing in the Jubilee Hall; Kilshaw had been forced to escape violence by a hasty flight, when he tried to address a meeting in the North-East ward; and there had been something like a free fight between the factions in Kettle Street. Captain Heseltine stated his opinion that if Sir Robert won, there would be "some fun" in Kirton, and was understood to mean that the Queen's Peace would be broken. Apparently the police authorities were of the same way of thinking, for at their request all preparations were made for calling out the Mounted Volunteers. Lord Eynesford declared that he would stand no nonsense, and a certain number of timid persons made arrangements to be out of Kirton on the all-important day.

At last it came, and wore itself away in a fever of excitement. While the poll was open there was no time to waste in quarrelling or parading, but in the evening, when the ballot-boxes were giving up their secret, the streets were crowded with dense throngs. The political leaders came dropping in from the country round. Medland was away and did not return, but Kilshaw was at the Club, and Puttock, all the local politicians, and most other men of note; for the Club was nearly opposite the

Hall, where the crowd was thickest, and where the result would soon be proclaimed. Just below, one Todd, a well-known mob-orator, had mounted on a large packing-case and was exhorting the people to stand by Medland, happen what might; the police had tried to get near him and prevent him causing an obstruction, but his friends formed so dense a ring and offered such resistance that the attempt was prudently abandoned, and the sound of Mr. Todd's sweeping denunciations fell on the ears of the members as they talked within.

"I say, Kilshaw," called Captain Heseltine, who was by the window, "if you want to hear what you are, you'd better come here. Todd's letting you have it."

Kilshaw lounged to the window and put his head out, smiling scornfully.

"A lot of loafers and thieves," he remarked.

The crowd saw him. He was the especial object of their anger, ever since his share in Benyon's career had become public. He was greeted with an angry yell; the orator, seizing the occasion, shook a huge fist at him. Kilshaw laughed in reply, holding his cigar in his hand. There was an ugly rush at the Club door; an answering charge from the police; some oaths and some screams.

"You'd better vanish," suggested the Captain. "Your popularity is momentarily eclipsed."

"Damn the fellows," said Kilshaw. "They may storm the place if they like—I'll not move."

Matters were indeed becoming somewhat critical, when a loud shout was heard from in front of the Hall. The crowd forgot Kilshaw, forgot Mr. Todd, and rushed across the road. The first result was up!

For the next half-hour wild exultation reigned in the streets, and gloom predominated in the Club. The Kirton returns came out first, and, as the Chief Justice had prophesied, Medland swept the capital from end to end. A solid band of twenty members was elected in his interest, and he himself had an immense majority. The crowd was beside itself; all thought of defeat was at an end; they began to laugh, and smoke, and dive into the taverns in friendly groups to drink; they even flung jests up at Kilshaw, and only hooted good-humouredly when he cried,

"Wait a bit, my boys!"

Thus an hour passed without further news. Then the country results began to arrive. Among the first was that from Medland's own constituency: he was beaten by above a hundred votes. Anticipated as this issue was, it was greeted with a loud groan, soon changed to an exultant cheer when it was declared that Coxon had lost his seat; no event, short of the defeat of Kilshaw himself, would have pleased the crowd so much; even in the Club men seemed very resigned; only Coxon's little band mourned the fall of their chief.

"A facer for him," remarked the Captain. Mr. Kilshaw smiled.

"Coxon generally falls on his feet," he remarked.

This victory was almost the last excuse the crowd found for cheering. The figures came in thick and fast now, and the tale they told was of Medland's utter defeat. By twelve o'clock the issue in seventy-five seats was declared; of the other five, four were safe for Sir Robert; and Medland had only twenty-nine supporters. Puttock and Sir Robert were returned, and Kilshaw

had a triumphant majority. His was among the last announcements, and it was greeted with an angry roar of such volume that the Club window filled in a moment. The crowd, tired of their disappointing watch, turned away from the Jubilee Hall, and flocked together underneath the window.

"Why don't you return thanks?" asked Captain Heseltine.

Kilshaw was drinking a glass of brandy and soda-water. He jumped up, glass in hand, and, going to the window, bowed to the angry mob and drank a toast to his own success before their eyes. Mr. Todd's gross bulk pushed its way to the front.

"Come down here," he shouted, "and talk to us, if you dare!"

Kilshaw smilingly shook his head.

"Three cheers for Sir Robert!" he cried.

"How's your friend Benham?" shouted one.

"We'll serve you the same," yelled another; "come down;" and a third, whose partisanship outran his moral sense, proposed a cheer for Mr. François Gaspard.

"I think you'll have to sleep here," said the Captain.

"Not I," answered Kilshaw. "They daren't touch me."

"Hum!" said the Captain, doubtfully regarding the crowd. "I don't know that I'd care to insure you, if you go down now."

"We'll take you through," cried half-a-dozen young men, the sons of well-born or rich families, who were heart and soul with him, and asked for nothing better than a "row," with any one indeed, but above all with the mob which they scorned, and which had out-voted them in their own town.

The tramp of horses was heard outside. Two lines of mounted police were making their way slowly down the street. A moment later two voices sounded loud in altercation. The officer in command of the force was remonstrating with Big Todd; Big Todd was asserting that he had as much right as any one else to stand in the middle of Victoria Street and speak to his friends; the officer, strong in the letter of the law, maintained that no one, neither Big Todd nor another, had a right to adopt this course of action, or to do anything else than walk along the street whither his business might lead him.

"And they call this free speech!" cried Big Todd.

"Get on with you," said the officer.

"Now's your time," remarked the Captain. "Slip in between the two lines and you'll get through."

Kilshaw and his volunteer escort accepted the suggestion, and, linking arms, walked down-stairs. The Captain, after a brief inward struggle, followed them. Their appearance at the Club door was the signal for fresh hoots and groans.

"Now then, are you going?" said the officer to Big Todd.

The burly fellow cast a look round on his supporters.

"When I'm tired o' being here," he answered.

Kilshaw's band slipped in between the first and second rank. The officer touched his horse with the spur, and it sprang forward. Big Todd, with an oath, caught the bridle, and another man seized the rider by the leg. He struck out sharply, and the line of police moved forward.

"Stand up to 'em, boys," cried Big Todd, and he aimed a blow with his stick at his antagonist.

The young men round Kilshaw looked at one another and began to press forward. They wanted to join in.

A voice from behind them cried out warningly,

"None of that, gentlemen! You must leave it to us," and at the same instant the first rank seemed to leave them. The order to advance had been given, and the *mêlée* had begun. The rear rank advancing covered the members of the Club from attack.

"We seem to be spectators," observed Captain Heseltine, in a disappointed tone. He had earnestly hoped that some one would assault him.

Just ahead the fight was hot round Bigg Todd. The police were determined to arrest him, and had closed round where he stood. The big man was fighting like a lion, and some half-dozen were trying to protect him. On either side of this group the line of police passed on, driving the crowd before them. Their horses were trotting now, and the people ran before them or dodged into side streets and escaped. Big Todd and his little band were sore pressed. Todd was bleeding from the head and his right hand was numbed from a blow. He was down once, but up again in a second. As he rose, he caught sight of Kilshaw's scornful smile, and, swearing savagely, with a sudden rush he burst the ring round him and made for the arch-enemy. Kilshaw raised his arm to shield himself, Captain Heseltine stepped forward and deftly put out his foot. Big Todd, tripped in the manner of the old football, fell heavily to the ground, striking his bullet poll on the hard road.

Hector was slain. The Trojans scoured over the plain. Victoria Street was cleared, and Big Todd was borne on a stretcher to the police-station hard by.

"That fellow would have caught me a crack but for you, Heseltine," said Mr. Kilshaw.

A police-superintendent rode up.

"If you'd go home, gentlemen," he said, "our work would be easier. The trouble's not all over yet, I'm afraid. I'll send some of my men with you, Mr. Kilshaw, if you please, sir."

Kilshaw made a wry face.

"I wish I had my men," he said. "The Mounted Volunteers would teach these fellows a lesson."

"Well, we may see that before we're many days older, sir," answered the officer. "Mr. Medland'll be here to-morrow, and heaven knows what they'll be up to then."

CHAPTER XXVIII

STEALING A MARCH

ALICIA DEROSNE had a fantastic dream that night. She saw Medland again chasing a butterfly, as she had seen him on the day he came to Government House to receive his office. The butterfly floated always just over his head, and he always came near to catching it, yet never caught it. Then, by one of sleep's strange transformations, she seemed to be herself in spirit in the butterfly, and she knew that it flew so near because desire brought it, that it longed to be caught, and yet, at the last, by some sudden impulse, avoided his net. At last, as if wearied, he turned from her to another fluttering thing, and that he caught. And she heard a great murmur of voices applauding him, and he smiled and was content with his prize. Then she, the first butterfly, could not be happy unless she were caught also, envying the other, and she went and fluttered and spread her wings before his eyes, but he would not heed her, nor stretch the net over her, but smiled in triumph at the bright colours of his prize and the murmur of applause. And, with drooping wings, the first butterfly fell to the ground and died.

It needed no Joseph to interpret this dream. When he had called, she would not come. Now he would forget her and turn to the life of ambition and power that he loved. He would rule men, and trouble his head or his heart no more with the vagaries of girls and the strict scruples of

their code. And she—what was there left for her? "The last time," he had said. There was nothing for her to do but what the neglected butterfly had done. In a few weeks more the sea would lie between them, and she would be no more to him, nor he to her, than a memory—a memory soon to fade in him, whose days and thoughts were so full; in her, it seemed, always to endure, ousting everything else, reigning in triumphant sorrow in an empty heart.

The news of the final result of the elections which Eleanor Scaife brought her in the morning while she was still in bed, presented to her mind another picture of the man, which appealed to her almost more strongly.

"It's a knock-down blow for Mr. Medland, isn't it?" asked Eleanor, sitting on the side of the bed. "As we're alone together, I may dare to say that I'm rather sorry. I didn't want him to win, but it's very hard on him to be crushed like this. How he must feel it!"

"He seems to have won in Kirton."

"Oh yes, just the town mob is with him. Fancy coming down to that! Of course he'll be quite powerless, compared to what he was. I wonder if he'll stay in politics. Captain Heseltine said some people thought that he'd throw the whole thing up and retire into private life."

"Yes, I'm sorry too," said Alicia, who lay all this while with her face away from Eleanor and toward the wall.

"And then his daughter's going to be married, and, of course, can never be such a companion to him as she has been; he'll be very much alone. Upon my word, Alicia, I'm getting quite senti-

mental about the man, and it's all his own fault, really. Why does he make it impossible for respectable people to follow him?" After a short pause, Miss Scaife suddenly laughed. "Do you know," she asked, "what that shameless Dick says? He says I ought to marry Mr. Medland, because we're both 'emancipated.' Really I'm not quite so 'emancipated' as Mr. Medland seems to be."

Alicia smiled faintly.

"What an idea!" she said, at last turning her face to her friend.

"He was only joking, of course. Assuming Mr. Medland asked me, and I'm sure nothing could be further from his thoughts, I'm afraid I should have to decline the honour. Wasn't it impertinent of Dick? It's lucky Mary didn't hear him. But, my dear, you must get up. All sorts of things are going on. It's most exciting."

"I thought all the excitement was over," said Alicia languidly.

"Oh, no. There was a riot in the streets last night, and they arrested some popular favourite and took him to prison. The mob's furious, and the police are afraid of a disturbance when he's brought before the magistrate this morning. Then Mr. Medland is to arrive at twelve o'clock, and they're afraid of another riot then. Sir Robert was here at half-past eight, and at his request the Governor authorised calling out the Mounted Volunteers to keep order. Lord Eynesford says he'll go with them. Do get up," and Eleanor went off, eager to hear the latest news. The present situation was justifying her tenacious opinion that new communities were interesting.

In spite of her many inquiries, her intelligence was not quite the latest. The police had stolen a march on the crowd, and Big Todd had been quietly brought before the seat of justice at nine o'clock, remanded for a week, and carried off to the prison, which was situated outside the town, about half-a-mile beyond Government House. The van containing the captive had rolled unsuspected through the streets, and it was not till the crowd had waited an hour outside the court that the secret leaked out. The outwitted men were in a fury. The mounted police lined the sides of the street, and their impassive demeanour seemed to rouse the mob to fresh anger. There had been a plan to rescue Big Todd, now it was too late, and men looked at one another in sullen wrath. The crowd drifted off toward the railway station, thinking to welcome Medland. The Mounted Volunteers were on guard there. They saw Kilshaw at the head of his company and hailed him with a groan. Behind the ranks, the Governor sat on his horse, flanked by his *aides-de-camp* and talking to Sir Robert Perry. No one was allowed within the station-yard, every one was compelled to move about, the preparations were complete, to riot would be to run against a stone wall.

Suddenly an idea, a suggestion, flew through the crowd. It was greeted with surly smiles and emphatic nods. To the surprise of the officers and of the Governor, the crowd began to melt away. Splitting up in twos and threes, it sauntered off, as if it had made up its mind to submit quietly to the inevitable. Soon only women and children were left, and the Governor began to feel that the array of force was almost ridiculously out of proportion

to the need. The whole thing was, as Captain Heseltine regretfully observed, "fizzling out," and he proposed to go home to lunch.

Medland's train arrived half-an-hour later, and he came out of the station, looking round in surprise at the martial aspect of the scene. Then he smiled.

"We look rather asses," whispered Heseltine. "I wonder if they did it on purpose."

Medland came down the steps and found himself almost face to face with Kilshaw. The ex-Premier was smoking a cigar, and he took it out of his mouth, in order to smile more freely.

"If," he said to Kilshaw, "it's not dangerous to public order, I should like a cab."

Kilshaw heard a shamefaced, stifled giggle from his men behind him and turned very red. The next minute Sir Robert came up, holding out his hand.

"This is a great compliment to you," he said, smiling.

"Evidently beyond my deserts," answered Medland, getting into his cab. "To my house," he called to the man, and was driven rapidly away.

The Governor rode up to Sir Robert with a look of vexation on his face.

"The sooner we end this farce the better," he said. "I'm going home. I suppose you'll send the men to quarters."

"I really don't understand it," protested Sir Robert. "They looked like mischief."

"I suppose we frightened them. Oh, no doubt you were right," and the Governor turned his horse.

Suddenly the figure of a man on horseback,

going at a gallop, was seen in the distance. The Governor drew rein and waited. The man came nearer, and, as soon as he was within earshot, he shouted,

"The prison! the prison! They've all gone to the prison."

"What?" cried the Governor.

"All the crowd," panted the messenger. "They mean to have Big Todd out. We've only got ten men there, and the people are threatening to burn the place down if he's not given up."

"By Jove, they've jockeyed us!" cried Captain Heseltine, and he turned to his chief for orders.

"We must be after them," exclaimed the Governor. "Let the orders be given. You, Heseltine, go and bring up the police. This looks like business."

The column was soon on the march, followed by a string of women and children, which was speedily outstripped when the word to trot was given. The outskirts of the town were reached; they met man after man who told them of a gathering crowd round the prison; they overtook more men, armed with cudgels, who slunk on one side and tried to hide their sticks. They reached the gates of Government House, and Lord Eynesford spied his wife and Alicia looking out of the windows of the lodge.

"Go and tell them what's up," he said to Flemyng. "Say there's no danger," and the column trotted on.

"This is what Mr. Medland has brought us to," observed Lady Eynesford, when Mr. Flemyng made his report. "I'm glad we've done with him, anyhow, aren't you, Eleanor?"

"Perhaps we haven't," suggested Eleanor. "I wonder if he's come back."

"No doubt he's encouraging this riot. I only hope he'll get the treatment he deserves."

Alicia stood by in silence. The little room felt close and hot. She was tired and worn out, for she had spent the morning writing a letter that seemed very hard to write.

"Mightn't we go into the garden?" she asked. "There's no danger to us, is there, Mr. Flemyng?"

"Oh dear, no, Miss Derosne. They're only thinking of Big Todd. I'll go on if you don't want me, Lady Eynesford."

He trotted off and overtook the rest just as they came in sight of the prison. The crowd was thick round it.

"By heaven, they've got the door open!" cried Heseltine.

They had. The heavy door hung on its hinges, and, as the Governor drew nearer, he saw the prisoner, Big Todd himself, in the centre of the crowd. There were near three thousand there, almost all men; most had sticks, here and there the sun caught the gleam of a knife or the glint from a revolver-barrel. A rude kind of rampart of the tables and chairs from the gaol formed a slight makeshift barricade, and behind it, the crowd, backed by the building, stood waiting for the attack.

The Governor halted.

"It really looks rather serious," he said.

Sir Robert Perry, whose fat cob was panting with unusual exertions, nodded assent.

"We don't want bloodshed, if we can help it," he observed.

"No, but we'll have that fellow," said the Governor curtly, "or I'll know the reason why."

His old instincts were astir in him. He had been a soldier in his time, and he almost regretted that his first duty was to reason with these men. Endeavouring to carry out this duty, he said to Heseltine,

"Go and say I'll give them three minutes to hand over Todd and disperse."

Heseltine rode forward till he came to the barricade and delivered his message, adding,

"Look sharp. There you are, Todd! Now come along, my man."

"Come and fetch me," grinned Big Todd.

"So we will," answered the Captain, smiling, "but you'd better come quietly."

"Look here, sir. Say no more about what happened last night and we'll give the Governor back his prison. We ain't hurt it, not to speak of."

Heseltine laughed.

"You're an insolent scoundrel," he said.

"You'd better get a bit further off before you talk like that, young man," growled a fierce-looking little fellow.

"Let the gentleman alone, Tim," said Big Todd. "He's a flag o' truce."

"Then you won't come?" asked the Captain.

"Declined with thanks, sir," bowed Big Todd.

Heseltine rode back and delivered the reply. An angry flush crossed Lord Eynesford's face.

"Very well," he said shortly, and turned to the Colonel. "Colonel," he said, "I want your men to scatter that crowd and bring Todd here. Don't fire without asking me again. Use the flat of the sword unless the crowd use knives or shoot; if

they do, use the edge. I can't come with you, I wish I could."

"May I go, sir?" broke simultaneously from Dick and Heseltine.

"No," answered Lord Eynesford shortly.

"What a damned shame!" grumbled Dick.

The Colonel had spoken to the captains of his two companies, Kilshaw and another, and they in their turn had briefly communicated the Governor's orders to their men. Everything was ready, and the Colonel turned a last inquiring glance toward the Governor.

"Yes," said Lord Eynesford; but at the same moment a loud cheer rang out from the defenders of the gaol—

"Three cheers for Jimmy Medland!" they cried.

The Governor turned and saw the ex-Premier leaping from a cab and hurrying toward them.

"Stop!" cried Medland. "Stop!"

CHAPTER XXIX

A BEATEN MAN'S THOUGHTS

On reaching his home, Medland had found that Norburn had arrived before him, and was engaged in the task of consoling Daisy for the untoward issue of the fight. Daisy, on her part, was full of praise for the valour of Big Todd, and delighted to hear of the sort of fiasco that had waited on the military display at the station. Safe from the eyes of all save those who loved him, Medland did not maintain the indifferent air that he had displayed in public. In vain they reminded him of the swift reactions in political affairs, of the sturdy band that still owned his leadership, and of the devotion of all Kirton to him, or bade him think that he was himself almost a young man, and that this defeat was but a check and not an end to his career. For the moment the buoyancy was out of him; he did not care to discuss hopes or projects, and sat silent in his chair, while Norburn sketched new campaigns and energetic raids on Sir Robert's position. Daisy knew her father: these hours of despondency were the penalty he paid for the glowing confidence and rebounding hope that had made him the man and the power he was.

"Let him alone a little while," she whispered to her lover. "Something will rouse him soon, and he'll be himself again."

She put his letters by him, and the two left him to solitude in his study. He was vaguely surprised

that no crowd had assembled to escort him to his house, and that the street was so quiet; he supposed that his adherents felt much as he did, too discouraged to make a parade, or try to hide their wounds under the pretence of a brave show; yet he was sensitive enough to every breath of popular sentiment to be hurt at the first sign of neglect. Perhaps they had had enough of him, perhaps they were looking for a new leader. No; that could hardly be, or they would not have elected all his friends. It was just that they felt as he did, beaten, soundly beaten, and had fled to their dens to lick their sores.

He listlessly stretched out his hand toward the letters and began to open them. Here were belated requests for help or advice, calculations of majorities and prophecies of victory, written at the last moment in unquenchable faith, to be read now with a weary smile of irony. Here too were honest, admiring condolences. "Better luck next time"—"Never despair," and so forth—side by side with anonymous and scurrilous gloatings over his fall. Once he laughed out loud: a zealous student compared him at length and in detail to Cleon, and ended with an ode of triumph which, he said, would appear in the press the next day or so. Medland pushed the heap away with an impatient sigh, but one note remained under his hand and he took it up, for it seemed different from the rest. He undid the envelope and glanced at the signature; then he sat up in sudden interest, for it was signed "Alicia Derosne."

"You will be surprised," she said, "that I should write; but I doubted if you understood the other night, and I can't be misunderstood by you. If

you were what I once thought you, I would do all you ask, whatever it cost me, but I can't now. It's all different now. That thing makes it all different. You will think it a poor reason and a strange idea—I know you will; but your thinking it strange is just what makes it strongest to me. You may not understand—I'm afraid you won't—but you must believe that that is the only thing. Please don't try to see me, but send one line to say you believe me.—ALICIA DEROSNE. Good-bye."

At first he thought of what he read only as a fresh defeat, another drop of bitterness in a brimming cup, and he let the letter fall, despising himself for caring about such a matter. But he took it up again and re-read it, and the "Good-bye," at the end—the stifled cry of pain—touched him; she had finished the letter before she wrote that, for its ink was paler; the rest had dried, that had been hastily blotted; it was an after-impulse, a hint of the struggle with which she left her tenderness unexpressed. He pictured so well how she looked writing it, making her sacrifice at the altar of what she held holy in herself. Whether she were right or wrong seemed now to his softer mood to be of little moment. He could not think that she was right, and yet it suited her so well to be wrong on such a point that he could hardly wish her to have been what to his mind seemed right. With the strange feeling of the end of things, of finality, that his defeat and despondency had brought to him, her decision fitted well. She would not come to him, but the ideal of her rested beautiful in the delicate pride and fastidiousness of her scruples and her purity. The sort of life he must lead, no

less than that he had led, must needs have soiled the image and stained its spotless white. He was conscious that his reception of what she said was half the outcome of the moment in which her decision reached him; but yet he could not look before him, and the idea of himself, restored to his former mind, scornfully mocking what now claimed reverence, angrily fighting against a merely fanciful hindrance, failed to dress itself like reality, though experience, half-smothered, protested that it would prove real. Now he was very sorry for her and for himself; but it was the sorrow of acquiescence, the pain of a vision that never could have had fulfilment, not the fierce disappointment of well-grounded hope. Though she were passing out of his life, yet she would always be in it and of it, and their unhappiness seemed to him a tie as close as could have been knit between them by any union.

He was interrupted by the entrance of his daughter and Norburn. They were troubled, as a glance at their happy faces told him, by no sense of the end of things; they were at the beginning, and he was amused to find that, while they deplored his defeat sincerely and resented it hotly, it yet had a bright side to them. It set Jack Norburn at liberty; he had now no official ties and there would be a lull in politics. How should two young people use such an interval better than in getting married?

"How indeed?" said Mr. Medland, smiling.

"Then when we're comfortably married," said Daisy, "and you've had a little rest, we'll have at Sir Robert again, father! Oh, and I'm so glad those tiresome Eynesfords are going — except

Alicia, I mean; I like her. I do hope the next people won't be quite so—" And Daisy's gesture indicated the inhuman exclusiveness and pride supposed to be harboured at Government House.

"Well, we go our way and they go theirs," said Norburn, with his good-humoured laugh. "We're happy in ours, I hope they're happy in theirs. Then, as soon as Daisy can be ready, sir?"

"Yes, as soon as Daisy can be ready," assented Medland.

When, after thanks and some more rose-coloured prophecies, they were gone together, he rose and, hands in pockets, paced up and down the narrow room.

"Really, young Norburn has got the philosophy of it," he mused. "He takes my daughter, and his philosophy takes the only other woman I care about! But I believe, after all, that it's bad philosophy."

He stretched his arms in weariness.

"Ah, I feel burnt out!" he said, sinking back into his chair. "I must answer this," and he took up Alicia's note again, only to fold it up and put it in his pocket.

"I can't do it now. I must have some fresh air," he exclaimed petulantly. "This place suffocates me."

He opened the window and hailed a hack-victoria that was crawling by. Calling to Daisy to tell her he was going for a drive, he ran downstairs and jumped in.

"Go to the Park," he said. "You needn't hurry."

The air revived his spirits. He leant back, sniffing its freshness, and finding the world very

good. He met few people about and no one that he knew. The Park was empty, and the old horse jogged along peacefully. Insensibly he found himself thinking about what would happen when the new House met, and sparing a smile for Coxon's defeat, though he was afraid that gentleman would be only too well provided for. It struck him that a pitfall or two lay in Sir Robert's path, and he saw his way to giving Kilshaw a bad quarter of an hour over one of his election speeches. The only thing that he could not get away from was the thought of Alicia Derosne. He knew that there was to be nothing more between him and her, and that she was going away soon, never to return to, soon in all probability to forget, New Lindsey; yet all his doings and activities in the future—and his brain began now to be swift to plan them again—presented themselves to him, not in the actual happening, but as they would look when read by her. This lover's madness irritated him so much that at last he took her letter from his pocket and tore it into little bits, scattering them on the breeze. He could answer it well enough from memory, and perhaps it would be easier to be his own man again when he had no tangible, material reminder of her with him. These things only made a man nurse and cosset fine-drawn feelings, spying curiously into a heart that might get well if it were covered up and left alone.

A cheery voice roused him, and his carriage stopped.

"Well, tearing up your bills, eh?" called the Chief Justice from the side-walk. "You must be glad to be out of it."

"Not I," answered Medland, smiling. "Among other things, I wanted to appoint your successor."

"Ah, dreadful, dreadful! Young Coxon, isn't it? I've been laid up with a cold, and seen and heard nothing, but I fancy that's right."

"I suppose he'll do pretty well, but he's not the right man to come after you. However, I am powerless now."

"Yes, order is safe again. By the way, I hear your friends made a little disturbance last night."

"Oh, yes; that headstrong fellow Todd. We can never hold him. It came to nothing, I suppose?"

"They arrested him, you know. But, Medland, I doubt——"

The driver turned round suddenly.

"Did you say Medland, sir?" he asked the Chief Justice. "Is this gentleman Mr. Medland?"

"What, didn't you know me?"

"No, sir; I'm only just out from England. But, if you're Mr. Medland, don't you know, sir—begging your pardon—what's happened about Todd?"

"No; what?"

"There's a fine row up at the prison, sir. Two or three thousand of 'em went up there this morning to take him out, and the Governor's up there with the Volunteers, and they say there's going to be a big fight and——"

"The fools!" exclaimed Medland. "I must go, Chief Justice."

"Why, what can you do?"

"Stop it, of course. Here, drive to the prison—drive like fury. Good-bye, Chief Justice. Come and see me soon. Get on, man, get on!"

The old horse was whipped up unmercifully, and the Chief Justice watched Medland disappear in a cloud of dust. He took off his hat to wipe his brow. Two little fragments of the white paper which Medland scattered had settled upon it.

"Poof!" The Chief Justice blew them off and they fluttered down on the grass. He stooped and picked up the larger bit. If he had looked at it, he would have read "Good-bye"; but he did not. The amber end of his cigarette-tube was loose: he unscrewed it, twisted the little bit of paper round the screw, and fitted the end on again.

"Capital!" said the Chief Justice. "It might have been made for it. Poor old Medland!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE END OF A TUMULT

"STOP!" he shouted; "stop!" and, taking advantage of the momentary pause, he made his way to the Governor.

"Let me speak to them, sir," he said; "I think I can bring them to reason."

But Lord Eynesford's spirit was roused.

"I must request you to leave the matter to me, Mr. Medland," he answered stiffly. "They have had their opportunity of submitting to the law peaceably, and they have chosen to disregard it."

"If you will give me five minutes, sir," said Medland, very humbly. He loved the rough fellows who were acting so foolishly: perhaps something in his words had given them an excuse. He could not bear to think of them coming to harm, even through their own fault.

"I can't, sir," answered the Governor sharply. "I have the dignity of the Crown, which I represent, to think of. Pray stand aside, sir;" and he added to the Colonel—"Your orders are not altered."

Medland's quick eye measured the distance between him and the rioters. He was standing near the Governor, at the side of the troops, but a little in advance of their line. A run might bring him to them before the troops could reach them. If they did not resist there could be no bloodshed. There was yet a chance, and suddenly he dashed

across in front of the line, crying, "Don't resist! don't resist!"

At the very moment of his start the Colonel had given the word to charge. No man saw clearly how it happened, but there was a forward dash, then an exclamation from one of the Volunteers, as he reined his horse back on its haunches, a wild cry from the barricade, and a loud shout, "Halt!" from Kilshaw. The line was stopped, and Kilshaw rode swiftly up to where the trooper had wrenched back his horse. Medland lay on the ground in front of the horse. The man had seen him too late to avoid him; he had been knocked down and trampled with the hoofs. His face was pale, and a slight twist of the features told of pain. He held his hand to his right side.

Kilshaw was off his horse in an instant.

"Back there, back!" he cried. "Don't crowd on him."

The Governor rode up; a group gathered round. There was no more thought of the charge. The rioters, after an instant, broke the barricade and came out, one by one, timidly making for the spot.

"Here," whispered Kilshaw to Dick Derosne, "you lift his head. He won't want to see me," and he drew back behind the wounded man.

The Governor dismounted and stood by his brother, but before Dick could lift Medland's head, a rough woman, in a coarse gown, pushed through, elbowing him and Lord Eynesford aside.

"Let me, gentlemen," she said, her eyes full of tears, as she pillowed his head in her lap. "He's always been for us, Mr. Medland has," she explained. "Give me a clean handkerchief, one of you."

The Governor handed his, and she wiped the clammy moisture from the forehead and hands.

Medland opened his eyes.

"The horse kicked me in the side," he murmured faintly, "here, on the right—low down. I'm in pain."

Then he saw Dick Derosne.

"Mr. Derosne!" he called faintly, and Dick knelt down to listen. "Tell your sister I believe."

"What?" asked Dick in sheer surprise.

"You heard?" asked Medland petulantly.

"Yes—that you believe."

"Well, tell her," and he turned away his head.

There was a little bustle outside the group, and then Big Todd burst through.

"Is he killed?" he cried.

Medland saw him and stretched out his hand. Big Todd caught it, and the dying man pressed the fellow's knotted fist. Perhaps he saw in Todd the type of the "Great Beast," clumsy, often wrong-headed, but honest at heart, that he loved and worked for.

"What did you want to be such an infernal fool for, man?" he said, with a little smile. Then his eyes closed, and the woman wiped his forehead and kissed him.

The group round him drew back, leaving the woman and Todd near him. Presently some dozen of the rioters brought the top of a table from their barricade, and lifted him on to it. Then Big Todd spoke to the Governor.

"There'll be no more fighting," he said. "I'll give myself up, but I'd like to help the chaps to take him home first."

The Governor nodded, and they raised the table

on their shoulders and set out for Kirton. Behind them came the woman and a few more of the same class; some children stole out from the back of the gaol and took their places. After them marched the rioters, and last of all the Governor, his party, and the troops. And in this order the procession passed along. And some time before it had gone far, Medland bled to death inwardly; his strength failed him and he gave a convulsive shiver, opened his eyes for the last time to the sky, and then lay still under the rough coat that Big Todd had thrown over him.

"Dick, Dick," whispered the Governor, when they came near Government House, "ride on and tell them."

Lady Eynesford, Eleanor Scaife, and Alicia were standing at the gate. They had hardly seen the procession turn a corner and come into sight before Dick galloped up.

"What is it, Dick?" cried Lady Eynesford. "Willie's not hurt?"

"No—it's—it's Mr. Medland."

Eleanor was standing by Alicia, and she felt a sudden clutch on her arm.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"I'm afraid he's very badly hurt," answered Dick, and drawing near his sister he whispered, "Al, he sent you a message. I don't know what it means, but—he believes."

One swift glance told him she heard, then her eyes fixed themselves on the advancing crowd, and the burden the men carried.

They halted a moment. The table was lowered; a man—apparently a doctor—had ridden up. He looked at the burden they bore, then he spread

the rough coat again over the body and signed to them to go on. Dick stepped forward and asked a question. Returning, he said briefly,

"He's dead."

Alicia swayed heavily against Eleanor Scaife. Eleanor threw her arm round her waist, and answered the moan she heard with—"Hush, darling!" while Alicia, with parted lips and straining eyes, watched him carried by.

As they had escorted him home on the day when he first became their ruler, so they took him to his home now, the throng of mourners ever growing as the people poured out of the town to meet them, until they reached his house and halted before his door, waiting for some one who should dare to carry the news to the fair-haired girl who had met him in triumph when he came before.

In Kirton the name of "Jimmy Medland" is still remembered, and his grave does not lack continual flowers. In far-off England few remember him, and his name is seldom spoken, save when a very old white-haired man comes to stay with a lady in one of the Midland shires. Then, when they are alone, when her husband has gone hunting and the children are away, and there is no other ear to listen, Alicia will sometimes talk to Sir John of Mr. Medland, what he was and was not, what he did and dreamed, how he lived and died, and how the men of Kirton love his memory.

"It all seems like a dream now," she says, "but it's a dream I can never forget."

And Sir John presses her hand, for perhaps he guesses what she has not told him.

His daughter wrote on his tomb nothing except

his name; but a wandering Englishman, who heard his story, and recollected the grave of another who died with his work undone, has rudely scratched at the base, near the ground, where the grass half hides it, an epitaph for him—*Plura moliebatur.* And he told Big Todd, whom he chanced to find smoking his evening pipe hard by, that it meant "He had more work in hand."

"Ay, trust old Jimmy!" said Big Todd, with a curious wave of his great hand toward the grave. Had such a thing been at all in his way, one might have thought it was a benediction.

THE END.

FATHER STAFFORD

FATHER STAFFORD

CHAPTER I

EUGENE LANE AND HIS GUESTS

THE world considered Eugene Lane a very fortunate young man; and if youth, health, social reputation, a seat in Parliament, a large income, and finally the promised hand of an acknowledged beauty can make a man happy, the world was right. It is true that Sir Roderick Ayre had been heard to pity the poor chap on the ground that his father had begun life in the workhouse; but everybody knew that Sir Roderick was bound to exalt the claims of birth, inasmuch as he had to rely solely upon them for a reputation, and discounted the value of his opinion accordingly. After all, it was not as if the late Mr. Lane had ended life in the undesirable shelter in question. On the contrary, his latter days had been spent in the handsome mansion of Millstead Manor; and, as he lay on his deathbed, listening to the Rector's gentle homily on the vanity of riches, his eyes could wander to the window and survey a wide tract of land that he called his own, and left, together with immense sums of money, to his son, subject only to a jointure for his wife. It is hard to blame the tired old man if he felt, even with the homily ringing in his ears, that he had not played his part in the world badly.

Millstead Manor was indeed the sort of place to raise a doubt as to the utter vanity of riches. It was situated hard by the little village of Millstead, that lies some forty miles or so northwest of London, in the middle of rich country. The neighbourhood afforded shooting, fishing, and hunting, if not the best of their kind, yet good enough to satisfy reasonable people. The park was large and well wooded; the house had insisted on remaining picturesque in spite of Mr. Lane's improvements, and by virtue of an indelible stamp of antiquity had carried its point. A house that dates from Elizabeth is not to be entirely put to shame by one or two unblushing French windows and other trifling barbarities of that description, more especially when it is kept in countenance by a little church of still greater age, nestling under its wing in a manner that recalled the good old days when the lord of the manor was lord of the souls and bodies of his tenants. Even old Mr. Lane had been mellowed by the influence of his new home, and before his death had come to play the part of Squire far more respectably than might be imagined. Eugene sustained the *rôle* with the graceful indolence and careless efficiency that marked most of his doings.

He stood one Saturday morning in the latter part of July on the steps that led from the terrace to the lawn, holding a letter in his hand and softly whistling. In appearance he was not, it must be admitted, an ideal Squire, for he was but a trifle above middle height, rather slight, and with the little stoop that tells of the man who is town-bred and by nature more given to indoor than outdoor exercises; but he was a good-looking fellow for all

that, with a bright, humourous face,—though at this moment rather a bored one,—large eyes set well apart, and his proper allowance of brown hair and white teeth. Altogether, it may safely be said that not even Sir Roderick's nose could have sniffed the workhouse in the young master of Millstead Manor.

Still whistling, Eugene descended the steps and approached a group of people sitting under a large copper-beech tree. A still, hot summer morning does not incline the mind or the body to activity, and all of them had sunk into attitudes of ease. Mrs. Lane's work was reposing in her lap; her sister, Miss Jane Chambers, had ceased the pretense of reading; the Rector was enjoying what he kept assuring himself was only just five minutes' peace before he crossed over to his parsonage and his sermon; Lady Claudia Territon and Miss Katharine Bernard were each in possession of a wicker lounge, while at their feet lay two young men in flannels, with lawn-tennis racquets lying idle by them. A large jug of beer close to the elbow of one of them completed the luxurious picture that was framed in a light cloud of tobacco smoke, traceable to the person who also was obviously responsible for the beer.

As Eugene approached, a sudden thought seemed to strike him. He stopped deliberately, and with great care lit a cigar.

"Why wasn't I smoking, I wonder!" he said. "The sight of Bob Territon reminded me." Then, as he reached them, raising his voice, he went on:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to interrupt you, and with bad news."

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. Lane,

a gentle old lady, who having once had the courage to leave the calm of her father's country vicarage to follow the doubtful fortunes of her husband, was now reaping her reward in a luxury of which she had never dreamed.

"With the arrival of the 4.15 this afternoon," Eugene continued, "our placid life will be interrupted, and one of Mr. Eugene Lane, M.P.'s, celebrated Saturday to Monday parties (I quote from the *The Universe*) will begin."

"Who's coming?" asked Miss Bernard.

Miss Bernard was the acknowledged beauty referred to in the opening lines of this chapter, whose love Eugene had been lucky enough to secure. Had Eugene not been absurdly rich himself, he might have been congratulated further on the prospective enjoyment of a nice little fortune as well as the lady's favour.

"Is Rickmansworth coming?" put in Lady Claudia, before Eugene had time to reply to his *fiancée*.

"Be at peace," he said, addressing Lady Claudia; "your brother is not coming. I have known Rickmansworth a long while, and I never knew him to be polite. He inquired by telegram, reply not paid, who were to be here. When I wired him, telling him whom I had the privilege of entertaining, and requesting an immediate reply (not paid), he answered that he thought I must have enough Territons already, and he didn't want to make another."

Neither Lady Claudia nor her brother Robert, who was the young man with the beer, seemed put out at this message. Indeed, the latter went so far as to say:

"Good! Have some beer, Eugene?"

"But who is coming?" repeated Miss Kate. "Really, Eugene, you might pay a little attention to me."

"Can't, my dear Kate—not in public. It's not good form, is it, Lady Claudia?"

"Eugene," said Mrs. Lane, in a tone as nearly severe as she ever arrived at, "if you wish your guests to have either dinner or beds, you will at once tell me who and how many there are."

"My dear mother, they are in number five, composed as follows: First, the Bishop of Bellminster."

"A most interesting man," observed Miss Chambers.

"I am glad to hear it, Aunt Jane," responded Eugene. "The Bishop is accompanied by his wife. That makes two; and then old Merton, who was at the Colonial Office, you know, and Morewood, the painter, make four."

"Sir George Merton is a Radical, isn't he?" asked Lady Claudia severely.

"He tries to be," said Eugene. "Shall I order a carriage to take you to the station? I think, you know, you can stand it, with Haddington's help."

Mr. Spencer Haddington, the other young man in flannels, was a very rising member of the Conservative party, of which Lady Claudia conceived herself to be a pillar. Identity of political views, in Mr. Haddington's opinion, might well pave the way to a closer union, and this hope accounted for his having consented to pair with Eugene, who sat on the other side, and spend the last week in idleness at Millstead.

"Well," said Mr. Robert Territon, "it sounds slow, old man."

"Candid family, the Territons," remarked Eugene to the copper-beech.

"Who's the fifth? you've only told us four," said Kate, who always stuck to the point.

"The fifth is—" Eugene paused a moment, as though preparing a sensation; "the fifth is—Father Stafford."

Now it was a remarkable thing that all the ladies looked up quickly and re-echoed the name of the last guest in accents of awe, whereas the men seemed unaffected.

"Why, where did you pick *him* up? asked Lady Claudia.

"Pick him up! I've known Charley Stafford since we were both that high. We were at Harrow and at Oxford together. Rickmansworth knows him, Bob. You didn't come till he'd left."

"Why is the gentleman called 'Father'?" said Bob.

"Because he is a priest," Miss Chambers answered. "And really, Mr. Territon, you're very ignorant. Everybody knows Father Stafford. You do, Mr. Haddington?"

"Yes," said Haddington. "I've heard of him. He's an Anglican Father, isn't he? Had a big parish somewhere down the Mile End Road."

"Yes," said Eugene. "He's an old and a great friend of mine. He's quite knocked up, poor old chap, and had to get leave of absence; and I've made him promise to come and stay here for a good part of the time to rest."

"Then he's not going off again on Monday?" asked Mrs. Lane.

"Oh, I hope not. He's writing a book or something, that will keep him from being restless."

"How charming!" said Lady Claudia. "Don't you dote on him, Kate? Please, Mr. Lane, may I stay too?"

"By the way," said Eugene, "Stafford has taken a vow of celibacy."

"I knew that," said Lady Claudia imperturbably.

Eugene looked mournful; Bob Territon groaned tragically; but Lady Claudia was quite unmoved, and, turning to the Rector, who sat smiling benevolently on the young people, asked:

"Do you know Father Stafford, Dr. Dennis?"

"No. I should be much interested in meeting him. I've heard so much of his work and preaching."

"Yes," said Lady Claudia, "and his penances and fasting, and so on."

"Poor old Stafford!" said Eugene. "It's quite enough for him that a thing's pleasant to make it wrong."

"Not your philosophy, Master Eugene!" said the Rector.

"No, Doctor."

"But what's this vow?" asked Kate.

"There's no such thing as a binding vow of celibacy in the Anglican Church," announced Miss Chambers.

"Is that right, Doctor?" said Lady Claudia.

"God bless me, my dear," said the Rector. "I don't know. There wasn't in my time."

"But, Eugene, surely I'm right," persisted Aunt Jane. "His Bishop can dispense him from it, can't he?"

"Don't know," answered Eugene. "He says he can."

"Who says he can?"

"Why, the Bishop!"

"Well, then, of course he can."

"All right," said Eugene; "only Stafford doesn't think so. Not that he wants to be released. He doesn't care a bit about women—very ungratefully, as they're all mad about him."

"That's very rude, Eugene," said Kate, in reproving tones. "Admiration for a saint is not madness. Shall we go in, Claudia, and leave these men to pipes and beer?"

"One for you, Rector!" chuckled Bob Territon, who knew no reverence.

The two girls departed somewhat scornfully, arm in arm, and the Rector too rose with a sigh, and accompanied the elder ladies to the house, whither they were going to meet the pony carriage that stood at the hall door. A daily drive was part of Mrs. Lane's ritual.

"By the way, you fellows," Eugene resumed, throwing himself on the grass, "I may as well mention that Stafford doesn't drink, or eat meat, or smoke, or play cards, or anything else."

"What a peculiar beggar!" said Bob.

"Yes, and he's peculiar in another way," said Eugene, a little dryly; "he particularly objects to any remark being made on his habits—I mean on what he eats and drinks and so on."

"There I agree," said Bob; "I object to any remarks on what I eat and drink"; and he took a long pull at the beer.

"You must treat him with respect, young man. Haddington, I know, will study him as a phenomenon. I can't protect him against that."

Mr. Haddington smiled and remarked that such revivals of mediævalism were interesting, if morbid;

and having so delivered himself, he too went his way.

"That chap's considered very clever, isn't he?" asked Bob of his host, indicating Haddington's retreating figure.

"Very, I believe," said Eugene. "He's a cuckoo, you see."

"Dashed if I do," said Bob.

"He steals other birds' nests—eggs and all."

"Your natural history is a trifle mixed, old fellow ; kindly explain."

"Well, he's a thief of ideas. Never was the father of one himself, and gets his living by kidnapping."

"I never knew such a chap!" ejaculated Bob helplessly. "Why can't you say plainly that you think he's an ass?"

"I don't," said Eugene. "He's by no means an ass. He's a very clever fellow. But he lives on other men's ideas!"

"Oh! come and play billiards."

"I can't," said Eugene gravely. "I'm going to read poetry to Kate."

"By Jove, does she make you do that?"

Eugene nodded sadly and Bob went off into a fit of obtrusive chuckling. Eugene cast a large cushion dexterously at him and caught him just in the mouth, and, still sadly, rose and went in search of his lady-love.

"Why the dickens does he marry that girl?" exclaimed Bob. "It beats me."

Bob Territon was not the only person in whom Eugene's engagement to Kate Bernard inspired some surprise. But neither he nor any one else succeeded in formulating very definite reasons for

the feeling. Kate was a beauty, and a beauty of a type undeniably orthodox and almost aristocratic. She was tall and slight, her nose was the least trifle arched, her fingers tapered, and so, it was believed, did her feet. Her hair was golden, her mouth was small, and her accomplishments considerable. From her childhood she had been considered clever, and had vindicated her reputation by gaining more than one certificate from the various examining bodies which nowadays go up and down seeking whom they may devour. All these varied excellencies Eugene had had full opportunities of appreciating, for Kate was a distant cousin of his on the mother's side, and had spent a large part of the last few years at the Manor. It was, in fact, so obviously the duty of the two young people to fall in love with one another, that the surprise exhibited by their friends could only have been based on a somewhat cynical view of humanity. The cynics ought to have considered themselves confuted by the *fait accompli*, but they refused to do so, and, led by Sir Roderick Ayre, had been known to descend to laying five to four against the permanency of the engagement—an obviously coarse and improper proceeding.

It is possible that the odds might have risen a point or two, had these reprehensible persons been present at a little scene which occurred on the terrace, whither the girls had betaken themselves, and Eugene in his turn repaired when he had armed himself with Tennyson. As he approached Claudia rose to go and leave the lovers to themselves.

"Don't go, Lady Claudia," said Eugene. "I'm not going to read anything you ought not to hear."

Of course it was the right thing for Claudia to

go, and she knew it. But she was a mischievous body, and the sight of a cloud on Kate's brow had upon her exactly the opposite effect to what it ought to have had.

"You don't really want me to stay, do you? Wouldn't you two rather be alone?" she asked.

"Much rather have you," Eugene answered.

Kate rose with dignity.

"We need not discuss that," she said. "I have letters to write, and I am going indoors."

"Oh, I say, Kate, don't do that! I came out on purpose to read to you."

"Lady Claudia is quite ready to make an audience for you," was the chilling reply, as Kate vanished through the open door.

"There, you've done it now!" said Eugene. "You really ought not to insist on staying."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Lane. But it's all your fault." And Claudia tried to make her face assume a look of gravity.

A pause ensued, and then they both smiled.

"What were you going to read?" asked Claudia.

"Oh, Tennyson—always read Tennyson. Kate likes it because she thinks it's simple."

"You flatter yourself that you see the deeper meaning?"

Eugene smiled complacently.

"And you mean Kate doesn't? I'm glad I'm not engaged to you, Mr. Lane, if that's the kind of thing you say."

Eugene opened his mouth, shut it again, and then said blandly:

"So am I."

"Thank you! You need not be afraid."

"If I were engaged to you, I mightn't like you so well."

A slight blush became visible on Claudia's usually pale cheek.

Eugene looked away toward the horizon.

"I like the way quite pale people blush," he said.

"What do you want, Mr. Lane?"

"Ah! I see you appreciate my character. I want many things I can't have—a great many."

"No doubt," said Claudia, still blushing under the mournful gaze which accompanied those words. "Do you want anything you can have?"

"Yes! I want you to stay several more weeks."

"I am going to stay," said Claudia.

"How kind!" exclaimed Eugene.

"Do you know why?"

"My modesty forbids me to think."

"I want to see a lot of Father Stafford! Goodbye, Mr. Lane. I'll leave you to your private and particular understanding of Tennyson."

"Claudia!"

"Hold your tongue," she whispered, in tones of exasperation. "It's very wicked and very impertinent—and the library door's open, and Kate's in there!"

Eugene fell back in his chair with a horrified look, and Claudia rushed into the house.

CHAPTER II

NEW FACES AND OLD FEUDS

THERE was, no doubt, some excuse for the interest that the ladies of Millstead Manor had betrayed on hearing the name of Father Stafford. In these days, when the discussion of theological topics has emerged from the study into the street, there to jostle persons engaged in their lawful business, a man who makes for himself a position as a prominent champion of any view becomes, to a considerable extent, a public character; and Charles Stafford's career had excited much notice. Although still a young man but little past thirty, he was adored by a powerful body of followers, and received the even greater compliment of hearty detestation from all, both within and without the Church, to whom his views seemed dangerous and pernicious. He had administered a large parish with distinction; he had written a treatise of profound patristic learning and uncompromising sacerdotal pretensions. He had defended the institution of a celibate priesthood, and was known to have treated the Reformation with even less respect than it has been of late accustomed to receive. He had done more than all this: he had impressed all who met him with a character of absolute devotion and disinterestedness, and there were many who thought that a successor to the saints might be found in Stafford, if anywhere in this degenerate age. Yet though he was, or was thought to be, all this, his friends were yet loud in declaring—and ever

foremost among them Eugene Lane—that a better, simpler, or more modest man did not exist. For the weakness of humanity, it may be added that Stafford's appearance gave him fully the external aspect most suitable to the part his mind urged him to play; for he was tall and spare; his fine-cut face, clean-shaven, displayed the penetrating eyes, prominent nose, and large mobile mouth that the memory associates with pictures of Italian prelates who were also statesmen. These personal characteristics, combined with his attitude on Church matters, caused him to be familiarly known among the flippant by the nickname of the pope.

Eugene Lane stood upon his hearthrug, conversing with the Bishop of Bellminster and covertly regarding his betrothed out of the corner of an apprehensive eye. They had not met alone since the morning, and he was naturally anxious to find out whether that unlucky "Claudia" had been overheard. Claudia herself was listening to the conversation of Mr. Morewood, the well-known artist, and Stafford, who had only arrived just before dinner, was still busy in answering Mrs. Lane's questions about his health. Sir George Merton had failed at the last moment, "like a Radical," said Claudia.

"I am extremely interested in meeting your friend Father Stafford," said the Bishop.

"Well, he's a first-rate fellow," replied Eugene. "I'm sure you'll like him."

"You young fellows call him the pope, don't you?" asked his lordship, who was a genial man.

"Yes. You don't mind, do you? It's not as if we called him the Archbishop of Canterbury, you know."

"I shouldn't consider even that very personal," said the Bishop, smiling.

Dinner was announced. Eugene gave the Bishop's wife his arm, whispering to Claudia as he passed, "Age before impudence"; and that young lady found that she had fallen to the lot of Stafford, whereat she was well pleased. Kate was paired with Haddington, and Mr. Morewood with Aunt Jane. The Bishop, of course, escorted the hostess.

"And who," said he, almost as soon as he was comfortably settled to his soup, "is the young lady sitting by our friend the Father—the one, I mean, with dark hair, not Miss Bernard? I know her."

"That's Lady Claudia Territon," said Mrs. Lane. "Very pretty, isn't she? and really a very good girl."

"Do you say 'really' because, unless you did, I shouldn't believe it?" he asked, with a smile.

Mrs. Lane had been moved by this idea, but not consciously and, a little distressed at suspecting herself of an unkindness, entertained the Bishop with an entirely fanciful catalogue of Claudia's virtues, which, being overheard by Bob Territon, who had no lady, and was at liberty to listen, occasioned him immense entertainment.

Claudia, meanwhile, was drifting into a state of some annoyance. Stafford was very courteous and attentive, but he drank nothing, and apparently proposed to dine off dry bread. When she began to question him about his former parish, instead of showing the gratitude that might be expected, he smiled a smile that she found pleasure in describing as inscrutable, and said:

"Please don't talk down to me, Lady Claudia."

"I have been taught," responded Claudia, rather

stiffly, "to talk about subjects in which my company is presumably interested."

Stafford looked at her with some surprise. It must be admitted that he had become used to more submission than Claudia seemed inclined to give him.

"I beg your pardon. You are quite right. Let us talk about it."

"No, I won't. We will talk about you. You've been very ill, Father Stafford?"

"A little knocked up."

"I don't wonder!" she said, with an irritated glance at his plate, which was now furnished with a potato.

He saw the glance.

"It wasn't that," he said; "that suits me very well."

Claudia knew that a pretty girl may say most things, so she said:

"I don't believe it. You're killing yourself. Why don't you do as the Bishop does?"

The Bishop, good man, was at this moment drinking champagne.

"Men have different ways of living," he answered evasively.

"I think yours is a very bad way. Why do you do it?"

"I'm sure you will forgive me if I decline to discuss the question just now. I notice you take a little wine. You probably would not care to explain why."

"I take it because I like it."

"And I don't take it because I like it."

Claudia had a feeling that she was being snubbed, and her impression was confirmed when Stafford, a

moment afterward, turned to Kate Bernard, who sat on his left hand, and was soon deep in reminiscences of old visits to the Manor, with which Kate contrived to intermingle a little flattery that Stafford recognised only to ignore. They had known one another well in earlier days, and Kate was immensely pleased at finding her playfellow both famous and not forgetful.

Eugene looked on from his seat at the foot of the table with silent wonder. Here was a man who might and indeed ought to talk to Claudia, and yet was devoting himself to Kate.

"I suppose it's on the same principle that he takes water instead of champagne," he thought; but the situation amused him, and he darted at Claudia a look that conveyed to that young lady the urgent idea that she was, as boys say, "dared" to make Father Stafford talk to her. This was quite enough. Helped by the unconscious alliance of Haddington, who thought Miss Bernard had let him alone quite long enough, she seized her opportunity, and said in the softest voice:

"Father Stafford?"

Stafford turned his head, and found fixed upon him a pair of large, dark eyes, brimming over with mingled contrition and admiration.

"I am so sorry—but—but I thought you looked so ill."

Stafford was unpleasantly conscious of being human. The triumph of wickedness is a spectacle from which we may well avert our eyes. Suffice it to say that a quarter of an hour later Claudia returned Eugene's glance with a look of triumph and scorn.

Meanwhile, trouble had arisen between the Bishop

and Mr. Morewood. Morewood was an artist of great ability, originality, and skill; and if he had not attained the honors of the Academy, it was perhaps more his own fault than that of the exalted body in question, as he always treated it with an ostentatious contumely. After all, the Academy must be allowed its feelings. Moreover, his opinions on many subjects were known to be extreme, and he was not chary of displaying them. He was sitting on Mrs. Lane's left, opposite the Bishop, and the latter had started with his hostess a discussion of the relation between religion and art. All went harmoniously for a time; they agreed that religion had ceased to inspire art, and that it was a very regrettable thing; and there, one would have thought, the subject—not being a new one—might well have been left. Suddenly, however, Mr. Morewood broke in:

"Religion has ceased to inspire art because it has lost its own inspiration, and having so ceased, it has lost its only use."

The Bishop was annoyed. A well-bred man himself, he disliked what seemed to him ill-bred attacks on opinions which his position proclaimed him to hold.

"You cannot expect me to assent to either of your propositions, Mr. Morewood," he said. "If I believed them, you know, I should not be in the place I am."

"They're true, for all that," retorted Morewood. "And what is it to be traced to?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said poor Mrs. Lane.

"Why, to Established Churches, of course. As long as fancies and imaginary beings are left free to each man to construct or destroy as he will,—or

again, I may say, as long as they are fluid,—they subserve the pleasurableness of life. But when you take in hand and make a Church out of them, and all that, what can you expect?"

"I think you must be confusing the Church with the Royal Academy," observed the Bishop, with some acidity.

"There would be plenty of excuse for me, if I did," replied Morewood. "There's no truth and no zeal in either of them."

"If you please, we will not discuss the truth. But as to the zeal, what do you say to the example of it among us now?" And the Bishop, lowering his voice, indicated Stafford.

Morewood darted a glance at him.

"He's mad!" he said briefly.

"I wish there were a few more with the same mania about."

"You don't believe all he does?"

"Perhaps I can't see all he does," said the Bishop, with a touch of sadness.

"How do you mean?"

"I have been longer in the cave, and perhaps I have peered too much through cave-spectacles."

Morewood looked at him for a moment.

"I'm sorry if I've been rude, Bishop," he said more quietly, "but a man must say what he thinks."

"Not at all times," said the Bishop; and he turned pointedly to Mrs. Lane and began to discuss indifferent matters.

Morewood looked round with a discontented air. Miss Chambers was mortally angry with him and had turned to Bob Territon, whom she was trying to persuade to come to a bazaar at Bellminster on

the Monday. Bob was recalcitrant, and here too the atmosphere became a little disturbed. The only people apparently content were Kate and Haddington and Lady Claudia and Stafford. To the rest it was a relief when Mrs. Lane gave the signal to rise.

Matters improved, however, in the drawing-room. The Bishop and Stafford were soon deep in conversation; and Claudia, thus deprived of her former companion, condescended to be very gracious to Mr. Morewood, in the secret hope that that eccentric genius would make her the talk of the studios next summer by painting her portrait. Haddington and Bob had vanished with cigars; and Eugene, looking round and seeing that all was peace, said to himself in an access of dutifulness, "Now for it!" and crossed over to where Kate sat, and invited her to accompany him into the garden.

Kate acquiesced, but showed little other sign of relaxing her attitude of lofty displeasure. She left Eugene to begin.

"I'm awfully sorry, Kate, if you were vexed this morning."

Absolute silence.

"But, you see, as host here, I couldn't very well turn out Lady Claudia."

"Why don't you say Claudia?" asked Kate, in sarcastic tones.

Eugene felt inclined to fly, but he recognised that his only chance lay in pretending innocence when he had it not.

"Are we to quarrel about a trifle of that sort?" he asked; "a girl I have known like a sister for the last ten years!"

Kate smiled bitterly.

"Do you really suppose that deceives me? Of course, I am not afraid of your falling in love with Claudia; but it's very bad taste to have anything at all like flirtation with her."

"Quite right; it is. It shall not occur again. Isn't that enough?"

Kate, in spite of her confidence, was not anxious to drive Eugene with too tight a rein, so, with a nearer approach to graciousness, she allowed it to appear that it was enough.

"Then come along," he said, passing his arm around her waist, and running her briskly along the terrace to a seat at the end, where he deposited her.

"Really, Eugene, one would think you were a schoolboy. Suppose any one had seen us!"

"Some one did," said Eugene composedly, lighting his cigar.

"Who?"

"Haddington. He was sitting on the step of the sun-dial, smoking."

"*How* annoying! What's he doing there?"

"If you ask me, I expect he's waiting on the chance of Lady Claudia coming out."

"I should think it very unlikely," said Kate, with an impatient tap of her foot; "and I wish you wouldn't do such things."

Eugene smiled; and having thus, as he conceived, partly avenged himself, devoted the next ten minutes to orthodox love-making, with the warmth of which Kate had no reason to be discontent. On the expiration of that time he pleaded his obligations as a host, and they returned to the house, Kate much mollified, Eugene with the peaceful but fatigued air that that tells of duty done.

Before going to bed, Stafford and Eugene managed to get a few words together. Leaving the other men, except the Bishop, who was already at rest, in the billiard-room, they strolled out together on to the terrace.

"Well, old man, how are you getting on?" asked Eugene.

"Capitally! stronger every day in body and happier in mind. I grumbled a great deal when I first broke down, but now I'm not sure a rest isn't good for me. You can stop and have a look where you are going to."

"And you think you can stand it?"

"Stand what, my dear fellow?"

"Why, the life you lead—a life studiously emptied of everything that makes life pleasant."

"Ah! you are like Lady Claudia!" said Stafford, smiling. "I can tell you, though, what I can hardly tell her. There are some men who can make no terms with the body. Does that sound very mediæval? I mean men who, unless they are to yield utterly to pleasure, must have no dealings with it."

"You boycott pleasure for fear of being too fond of it?"

"Yes; I don't lay down that rule for everybody. For me it is the right and only one."

"You think it right for a good many people, though?"

"Well, you know, the many-headed beast is strong?"

"For me?"

"Wait till I get at you from the pulpit."

"No; tell me now."

"Honestly?"

"Of course; I take that for granted."

"Well, then, old fellow," said he, laying a hand on Eugene's arm, with a slight gesture of caress not unusual with him, "in candour and without unkindness, yes!"

"I never could do it," said Eugene.

"Perhaps not—at least, not yet."

"Too late or too early, is it?"

"It may be so, but I will not say so."

"You know I think you're all wrong."

"I know."

"You will fail."

"God forbid; but if he pleases——"

"After all, what are meat, wine, and—and so on for?"

"That argument is beneath you, Eugene."

"So it is. I beg your pardon. I might as well ask what the hangman is for if nobody is to be hanged. However, I'm determined that you shall enjoy yourself for a week here, whether you like it or not!"

Stafford smiled gently and bade him good night. A moment later Bob Territon emerged from the open windows of the billiard-room.

"Of all dull dogs, Haddington's the worst; however, I've won five pound of him! Hist! Is the Father here?"

"I'm glad to say he is not."

"Oh! Have you squared it with Miss Kate? I saw something was up."

"Miss Bernard's heart, Bob, and mine again beat as one."

"What was it particularly about?"

"An immaterial matter."

"I say, did you see the Father and Claudia?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Gammon! I tell you what, Eugene, if Claudia really puts her back into it, I wouldn't give much for that vow of celibacy."

"Bob," said Eugene, "you don't know Stafford; and your expression about your sister is—well, shall I say lacking in refinement?"

"Haddington didn't like it."

"Damn Haddington, and you too!" said Eugene impatiently, walking away.

Bob looked after him with a chuckle, and exclaimed enigmatically to the silent air, "Six to four, t. and o."

CHAPTER III

FATHER STAFFORD CHANGES HIS HABITS, AND MR. HADDINGTON HIS VIEWS

For sheer placid enjoyment and pleasantness of living, there is nothing like a sojourn in a well-appointed country house, peopled by well-assorted guests. The guests at Millstead Manor were not perhaps particularly well assorted ; but nevertheless the hours passed by in a round of quiet delights, and the long summer days seemed in no wise tedious. The Bishop and Mrs. Bartlett had reluctantly gone to open the bazaar and Miss Chambers went with them, but otherwise the party was unchanged ; for Morewood, who had come originally only for two days, had begged leave to stay, received it on condition of showing due respect to everybody's prejudices, telegraphed for his materials, and was fitfully busy making sketches, not of Lady Claudia, to her undisguised annoyance, but of Stafford, with whose face he had been wonderfully struck. Stafford himself was the only one of the party, besides his artistic tormentor, who had not abandoned himself to the charms of idleness. His great work was understood to make rapid progress between six in the morning, when he always rose, and half-past nine, when the party assembled at breakfast ; and he was also busy in writing a reply to a daring person who had recently asserted in print that on the whole the less said about the Council of Chalcedon the better.

"The pope's wild about it!" reported Bob Territon to the usual after-breakfast group on the lawn; "says the beggar's impudence licks him."

"He shall not work any more," exclaimed Claudia, darting into the house, whence she presently emerged, followed by Stafford, who resignedly sat himself down with them.

Such forcible interruptions of his studies were by no means uncommon. Eugene, however, who was of an observant turn, noticed—and wondered if others did—that the raids on his seclusion were much more apt to be successful when Claudia headed them than under other auspices. The fact troubled him, not only from certain unworthy feelings which he did his best to suppress, but also because he saw nothing but harm to be possible from any close *rapprochement* between Claudia and Stafford. Kate, on the contrary, seemed to him to have set herself the task of throwing them together; with what motive he could not understand. unless it were the recollection of his ill-fated "Claudia." He did not think this explanation very convincing, for he was well aware that Kate's scorn of Claudia's attractions, as compared with her own, was perfectly genuine, and such a state of mind would not produce the certainly active efforts she put forth. In truth, Eugene, though naturally observant, was, like all men, a little blind where he himself was concerned: and perhaps a shrewd spectator would have connected Haddington in some way with Miss Kate's manœuvres. Such, at any rate, was the view of Bob Territon, and no doubt he would have expressed it with his usual frankness if he had not had his own reasons for keeping silence.

STAFFORD CHANGES HIS HABITS

Stafford's state of mind was somewhat peculiar. A student from his youth, to whom invisible things had always seemed more real than visible, and hours of solitude better filled than busy days, he had had but little experience of that sort of humanity among which he found himself. A man may administer a cure of souls with marked efficiency in the Mile End Road, and yet find himself much at a loss when confronted with the latest products of the West End. The renunciation of the world, except so far as he could aid in mending it, had seemed an easy and cheap price to pay for the guerdon he strove for, to one who had never seen how pleasant this wicked world can look in certain of its aspects. Hitherto, at school, at college, and afterward, he had resolutely turned away from all opportunities of enlarging his experience in this direction. He had shunned society, and had taken great pains to restrict his acquaintance with the many devout ladies who had sought him out to the barest essentials of what ought to have been, if it was not always, their purpose in seeking him. The prince of this world was now preparing a more subtle attack; and under the seeming compulsion of common prudence no less than of old friendship, he found himself flung into the very centre of the sort of life he had with such pains avoided. It may be doubted whether he was not, like an unskillful swimmer, ignorant of his danger; but it is certain that, had he been able to search out his own heart with his former acuteness of self-judgment, he would have found the first germs of inclinations and feelings to which he had been up till now a stranger. He would have discovered the birth of a new longing for pleasure, a growing delight in the

sensuous side of things ; or rather, he would have become convinced that temptations of this sort, which had previously been in the main creatures of his own brain, postulated in obedience to the doctrines and literature in which he had been bred, had become self-assertive realities ; and that what had been set up only to be triumphantly knocked down had now taken a strong root of its own, and refused to be displaced by spiritual exercises or physical mortifications. Had he been able to pursue the analysis yet further, it may be that, even in these days, he would have found that the forces of this world were already beginning to personify themselves for him in the attractive figure of Claudia Territon. As it was, however, this discovery was yet far from him.

The function of passing a moral judgment on Claudia's conduct at this juncture is one that the historian respectfully declines. It is easy to blame fair damsels for recklessness in the use of their dangerous weapons ; and if they take the censure to heart—which is not usually the case—easy again to charge them with self-consciousness or self-conceit. We do not know their temptations and may not presume to judge them. And it may well be thought that Claudia would have been guilty of an excessive appreciation of herself had her conduct been influenced by the thought that such a man as Stafford was likely to fall in love with her. Of the conscious design of attracting him she must be acquitted, for she acted under the force of a strong attraction exercised by him. Her mind was not entirely engrossed in the pleasures, and what she imagined to be the duties, of her station. She had a considerable, if untrained and erratic, instinct tow-

ard religion, and exhibited that leaning toward the mysterious and visionary which is the common mark of an acute mind that has not been presented with any methodical course of training worthy of its abilities. Such a temperament could not fail to be powerfully influenced by Stafford; and when an obvious and creditable explanation lies on the surface, it is an ungracious task to probe deeper in the hope of coming to something less praiseworthy. Claudia herself certainly undertook no such research. It was not her habit to analyse her motives; and, if asked the reasons of her conduct, she would no doubt have replied that she sought Stafford because she liked him. Perhaps, if further pressed, she would have admitted that she found him occasionally a useful refuge against attentions from two other quarters which she found it necessary to avoid; in the one case because she would have liked them, in the other for exactly the opposite reason.

It cannot, however, be supposed that this latter line of diplomacy could be permanently successful. When you only meet your suitor at dances or operas, it may be no hard task to be always surrounded by a *chevaux-de-frise* of other admirers. We have all seen that manœuvre brilliantly and patiently executed. But when you are staying in a country house with any man of average pertinacity, I make bold to say that nothing short of taking to bed can be permanently relied upon. If this is the case with the ordinary man, how much more does it hold good when the assailant is one like Haddington—a man of considerable address, unbounded persistence, and limitless complacency? There came a time when Claudia's forced marches

failed her, and she had to turn and give battle. When the moment came she was prepared with an audacious plan of campaign.

She had walked down to the village one morning, attended by Haddington and protected by Bob, to buy for Mrs. Lane a fresh supply of worsted wool, a commodity apparently necessary to sustain that lady's life, and was returning at peace, when Bob suddenly exclaimed:

"By Jove! Tobacco! Wait for me!" and, turning, fled back whence he came, at full speed.

Claudia made an attempt at following him, but the weather was hot and the road dusty, and, confronted with the alternative of a *téte-â-téte* and a damaged personal appearance, she reluctantly chose the former.

Haddington did not let the grass grow under his feet. "Well," he said, "it won't be unpleasant to rest a little while, will it? Here's a dry bank."

Claudia never wasted time in dodging the inevitable. She sat down.

"I am very glad of this opportunity," Haddington began, in such a tone as a man might use if he had just succeeded in moving the adjournment. "It's curious how little I have managed to see of you lately, Lady Claudia."

"We meet at least five times a day, Mr. Haddington—breakfast, lunch, tea——"

"I mean when you are alone."

"Oh!"

"And yet you must know my great—my only object in being here is to see you."

"The less I say the sooner it will be over," thought Claudia, whose experience was considerable.

"You must have noticed my—my attachment. I hope it was without displeasure?"

This clearly called for an answer, but Claudia gave none. She sighed slightly and put up her parasol.

"Claudia, is there any hope for me? I love you more——"

"Mr. Haddington," said Claudia, "this is a painful scene. I trust nothing in my conduct has misled you. [This was known—how, I do not know—to her brothers as "Claudia's formula," but it is believed not to be uncommon.] But what you propose is utterly impossible."

"Why do you say that? Perhaps you do not know me well enough yet—but in time, surely?"

"Mr. Haddington," said Claudia, "let me speak plainly. Even if I loved you—which I don't and never shall, for immense admiration for a man's abilities is a different thing from love [Haddington looked somewhat soothed], I could never consent to accept the position of a *pis-aller*. That is not the Territon way." And Lady Claudia looked very proud.

"A *pis-aller!* What in the world do you mean?"

"Girls are not supposed to see anything. But do you think I imagine you would ever have honoured me in this way unless a greater prize had been—had appeared to be out of reach?"

This was not fair; but it was near enough to the mark to make Haddington a little uneasy. Had Kate been free, he would certainly have been in doubt.

"I bear no malice about that," she continued, smiling, "only you mustn't pretend to be broken-hearted, you know."

"It is a great blow to me—a great blow."

Claudia looked as if she would like to say "Fudge!" but restrained herself, and, with the daring characteristic of her, placed her hand on his arm.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Haddington. How it must gall you to see their happiness! I can understand you turning to me as if in self-protection. But you should not ask a lady to marry you because you're piqued with another lady. It isn't kind; it isn't, indeed."

Haddington was a little at a loss.

"Indeed, you're wholly wrong, Lady Claudia. Indeed, if you come to that, I don't see that they are particularly rapturous."

"You don't mean you think they're unhappy? Mr. Haddington, I am so grieved!"

"Do you mean to say you don't agree with me?"

"You mustn't ask me. But oh! I'm so sorry you think so too. Isn't it strange? So suited to one another—she so beautiful, he so clever, and both rich!"

"Miss Bernard is hardly rich, is she?"

"Not as Mr. Lane is, of course. She seems rich to me—forty thousand pounds, I think. Ah, Mr. Haddington, if only you had met her sooner!"

"I shouldn't have had much chance against Lane."

"Why do you say that? If you only knew——"

"What?"

"I mustn't tell you. How sad that it's too late!"

"Is it?"

"Of course. They're *engaged!*"

"An engagement isn't a marriage. If I thought——"

"Yes?"

"But I can't think of that now. Good-bye, Claudia. We may not meet again."

"Oh, you won't go away? You mustn't let me drive you away. Oh, please, Mr. Haddington! Think, if you go, it must all come out! I should be so very, very distressed."

"If you ask me, I will try to stay."

"Yes, yes, stay—but forget all this. And never think again of the other—about them, I mean. You will stay?"

"Yes, I will stay," said Haddington.

"Unless it makes you too unhappy to see Eugene's triumph in Kate's love?"

"I don't believe much in that. If that's the only thing—but I must go. I see your brother coming up the hill."

"Yes, go; and I'll never tell that you tried me as—as a second string!"

"That's very unjust," he protested, but more weakly.

"No, it isn't; I know your heart, and I do pity you."

"Perhaps I shall not ask for pity, Lady Claudia!"

"Oh, you mustn't think of that!"

"It was you who put it in my head."

"Oh, what have I done?"

Haddington smiled, and with a last squeeze of her hand turned and walked away.

Claudia put her handkerchief into her pocket and went to meet her brother.

Haddington returned alone to the house. Although suffering under a natural feeling of annoy-

ance at discovering that he was not foremost in Claudia's heart, as he had led himself to suppose, he was yet keenly alive to the fact that the interview had its consolatory aspect. In the first place, there is a fiction that a lady who respects herself does not fall in love with a man whom she suspects to be in love with somebody else; and Haddington's mind, though of no mean order in some ways, was not of a sort to rise above fictions. He comforted his vanity with the thought that Claudia had, by a conscious effort, checked a nascent affection for him, which, if allowed unimpeded growth, would have developed into a passion. Again, that astute young lady had very accurately conjectured his state of mind, while her pledge of secrecy disposed of the difficulty in the way of a too rapid transfer of his attentions. If Claudia did not complain, nay, counselled such action, who had a right to object? It was true she had eagerly disclaimed any intention of inciting him to try to break the ties that now bound Miss Bernard. But, he reflected, the important point was not the view she took of the morality of such an attempt, on which her authority was nought, but her opinion of its chances of success, which was obviously not wholly unfavourable. He did not trouble himself to inquire closely into any personal motive she may have had. It was enough for him that she, a person likely to be well informed, had allowed him to see that, to her thinking, the relations between the engaged pair were of a character to inspire in the mind of another aspirant hope rather than despair.

Having reached this conclusion, Haddington recognised that his first step must be to put Miss Bernard in touch with the position of affairs. It

may seem a delicate matter to hint to your host's *fiancée* that if she, on mature reflection, likes you better than him, there is still time ; but Haddington was not afflicted with delicacy. After all, in such a case a great deal depends upon the lady, and Haddington, though doubtful how Kate would regard a direct proposal to break off her engagement, was yet tolerably confident that she would not betray him to Eugene.

He found her seated on the terrace that was the usual haunt of the ladies in the forenoon and the scene of Eugene's dutiful labors as reader-aloud. Kate was not looking amiable ; and scarce six feet from her there lay open on the ground a copy of the Laureate's works.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Miss Bernard?"

"Oh, no. You see, I am alone. Mr. Lane was here just now, but he's gone."

"How's that?" asked Haddington, seating himself.

"He got a telegram, read it, flung his book away, and rushed off."

"Did he say what it was about?"

"No; I didn't ask him."

A pause ensued. It was a little difficult to make a start.

"And so you are alone?"

"Yes, as you see."

"I am alone too. Shall we console one another?"

"I don't want consolation, thanks," said Kate, a little ungraciously. "But," she added more kindly, "you know I'm always glad of your company."

"I wish I could think so."

"Why don't you think so?"

"Well, Miss Bernard, engaged people are generally rather indifferent to the rest of the world."

"Even to telegrams?"

"Ah! poor Lane!"

"I don't think Mr. Lane is in much need of pity."

"No—rather of envy."

Kate did not look displeased.

"Still a man is to be pitied if he does not appreciate——"

"Mr. Haddington!"

"I beg your pardon. I ought not to have said that. But it is hard—there, I'm offending you again!"

"Yes, you must not talk like that. It's wrong; it would be wrong even if you meant it."

"Do you think I don't mean it?"

"That would be very discreditable—but not so bad."

"You know I mean it," he said in a low voice. "God knows I would have said nothing if——"

"If what?"

"I shall offend you more than ever. But how can I stand by and see *that?*" and Haddington pointed with fine scorn to the neglected book.

Kate was not agitated. She seldom was. In a tone of grave rebuke, she said:

"You must never speak like this again. I thought I saw something of it. ["Good!" thought Haddington.] But whatever may be my lot, I am now bound to it. Pledges are not to be broken."

"Are they not being virtually broken?" he asked, growing bolder as he saw she listened to him.

Kate rose.

"You are not angry?"

"I cannot be angry if it is as you say. But please understand I cannot listen. It is not honourable. No—don't say anything else. But you must go away."

Haddington made no further effort to stop her. He was well content. When a lady hears you hint that her betrothed is less devoted than you would be in his place, and merely says the giving of such a hint is wrong, it may be taken that her sole objection to it is on the score of morality; and it is to be feared that objections based on this ground are not the most efficacious in checking forward lovers. Perhaps Miss Bernard thought they were. Haddington didn't believe she did.

"Go away?" he said to himself. "Hardly! The play is just beginning. Little Lady Claudia wasn't far out."

It is very possible she was not far out in her estimation of Mr. Haddington's character, as well as in her forecast of his prospects. But the fruits of her shrewdness on this point were happily hid from the gentleman concerned.

CHAPTER IV

SIR RODERICK AYRE INSPECTS MR. MOREWOOD'S MASTERPIECE

ABOUT a fortnight later than the last recorded incident two men were smoking on the lawn at Millstead Manor. One was Morewood; the other had arrived only the day before and was the Sir Roderick Ayre to whom reference has been made.

"Upon my word, Morewood," said Sir Roderick, as the painter sat down by him, "one can't go anywhere without meeting you!"

"That's since you took to intellectual company," said Morewood, grinning.

"I haven't taken to intellectual company," said Sir Roderick, with languid indignation. "In the general upheaval, intellectual company has risen in the scale."

"And so has at last come up to your pinnacle?

"And so has reached me, where I have been for centuries."

"A sort of perpetual dove on Ararat?"

"My dear Morewood, I am told you know everything except the Bible. Why choose your allusions from the one unfamiliar source?"

"And how do you like your new neighbour?"

"What new neighbour?"

"Intellect."

"Oh! well, as personified in you it's a not un-

wholesome astringent. But we may take an overdose."

"Depends on the capacity of the constitution, of course," said Morewood.

"One objectionable quality it has," pursued Sir Roderick, apparently unheedful.

"Yes?"

"A disposition toward what boys call 'scoring.' That will, no doubt, be eradicated as it rises more in society. *Apropos*, what are you doing down here?"

"As an artist, I study your insolence professionally, Ayre, and it doesn't annoy me. I came down here to do nothing. I have stayed to paint Stafford."

"Ah! is Stafford then a professional saint?"

"He's an uncommon fine fellow. You're not fit to black his boots."

"I'm not fit to black anybody's boots," responded Sir Roderick. "It's the other way. What's he doing down here?"

"I don't know. Says he's writing a book. Do you know Lady Claudia well?"

"Yes. Known her since she was a child."

"She seems uncommonly appreciative."

"Of Stafford?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well! it's her way. It always has been the way of the Territons. They only began, you know, about three hundred years ago, and ever since——"

"Oh, I don't want their history—a lot of scoundrels, no doubt, like all your old families. Only—I say, Ayre, I should like to show you a head of Stafford I've done."

"I won't buy it," said Sir Roderick, with affected trepidation.

"You be damned!" said Morewood. "But I should like to hear what you think of it."

"What do he and the rest of them think?"

"I haven't shown it to any one."

"Why not?"

"Wait till you've seen it."

"I should think Stafford would make rather a good head. He's got just that——"

"Hush! Here he comes!"

As he spoke, Stafford and Claudia came up the drive and emerged on the lawn. They did not see the others and appeared to be deep in conversation. Stafford was talking vehemently and Claudia listening with a look of amused mutiny on her face.

"He has sworn off, hasn't he?" asked Ayre.

"Yes."

"She doesn't care for him?"

"I don't think so; but a man can't tell."

"Nonsense!" said Ayre. "What's Eugene up to?"

"Oh, you know he's booked."

"Kate Bernard?"

"Yes."

"Tell you what, Morewood, I'll lay you——"

"No, you won't. Come and see the picture. It's the finest thing—in its way—I ever did."

"Going to exhibit it?"

"I'm going to work up and exhibit another I've done of him, not this one; at least, I'm afraid he won't stand this one."

"Gad! Have you painted him with horns and a tail?"

Whereto Morewood answered only:

"Come and see."

As they went in, they met Eugene, hands in pockets and pipe in mouth, looking immensely bored.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" said he. "Excuse the mode of address, but I've not seen a soul all the morning, and thought I must have dropped down somewhere in Africa. It's monstrous! I ask about ten people to my house, and I never have a soul to speak to!"

"Where's Miss Bernard?" asked Ayre.

"Kate is learning constitutional principles from Haddington in the shrubbery. Lady Claudia is learning sacerdotal principles from Stafford in the shrubbery. My mother is learning equine principles from Bob Territon in the stables. You are learning immoral principles from Morewood on the lawn. I don't complain, but is there anything a man can do?"

"Yes, there's a picture to be seen—Morewood's latest."

"Good!"

"I don't know that I shall show it to Lane."

"Oh, get out!" said Eugene. "I shall summon the servants to my aid. Who's it of?"

"Stafford," said Ayre.

"The pope in full canonicals?"

"All right, Lane. But you're a friend of his, and you mayn't like it."

They entered the billiard-room, a long building that ran out from the west wing of the house. In the extreme end of it Morewood had extemporised a studio, attracted by the good light.

"Give me a good top-light," he had said, "and I wouldn't change places with an archangel!"

"Your lights, top or otherwise, are not such," Eugene remarked, "as to make it likely the berth will be offered you."

"This picture is, I understand, Eugene, a stunner. Give us chairs and some brandy and soda and trot it out," said Ayre.

Morewood was unmoved by their frivolity. He tugged at his ragged red beard for a moment or two while they were settling themselves.

"I'll show you this first," he said, taking up one of the canvases that leant against the wall.

It was a beautiful sketch of a half-length figure, and represented Stafford in the garb of a monk, gazing up with eager eyes, full of the vision of the Eternal City beyond the skies. It was the face of a devotee and a visionary, and yet it was full of strength and resolution; and there was in it the look of a man who had put aside all except the service and the contemplation of the Divine.

Ayre forgot to sneer, and Eugene murmured:

"Glorious! What a subject! And, old fellow, what an artist!"

"That is good," said Morewood quietly. "It's fine, but as a matter of painting the other is still better. I caught him looking like that one morning. He came out before breakfast, very early, into the garden. I was out there, but he didn't see me, and he stood looking up like that for ever so long, his lips just parted and his eyes straining through the veil, as you see that. It may be all nonsense, but—fine, isn't it?"

The two men nodded.

"Now for the other," said Ayre. "By Jove! I feel as if I'd been in church."

"The other I got only three or four days ago.

Again I was a Paul Pry,—we have to be, you know, if we're to do anything worth doing,—and I took him as he sat. But I dare say you'd better see it first."

He took another and smaller picture and placed it on the easel, standing for a moment between it and the onlookers and studying it closely. Then he stepped aside in silence.

It was merely a head—nothing more—standing out boldly from a dark background. The face was again Stafford's, but the presentment differed strangely. It was still beautiful; it had even a beauty the other had not, the beauty of youth and passion. The devotee was gone; in his place was a face that, in spite of the ascetic cast of feature, was so lighted up with the fire of love and longing that it might have stood for a Leander or a Romeo. It expressed an eager yearning, that made it seem to be craning out of the picture in the effort to reach that unknown object on which the eyes were fixed with such devouring passion.

The men sat looking at it in amazement. Eugene was half angry, half alarmed. Ayre was closely studying the picture, his old look of cynical amusement struggling with a surprise which it was against his profession to admit. They forgot to praise the picture; but Morewood was well content with their tacit homage.

"The finest thing I ever did—on my life; one of the finest things any one ever did," he murmured; "and I can't show it!"

"No," said Eugene.

Ayre rose and took his stand before the picture. Then he got a chair, choosing the lowest he could find, and sat down, sitting well back. This atti-

tude brought him exactly under the gaze of the eyes.

"Is it your diabolical fancy," he said, "or did you honestly copy it?"

"I never stuck closer to what I saw," the painter replied. "It's not my doing; he looked like that."

"Then who was sitting, as it were, where I am now?"

"Yes," said Morewood. "I thought you couldn't miss it."

"Who was it?" asked Eugene, in an excited way.

The others looked keenly at him for a moment.

"You know," said Morewood. "Claudia Territon. She was sitting there reading. He had a book, too, but had laid it down on his knee. She sat reading, and he looking. In a moment I had caught the look. Then she put down the book; and as she turned to him to speak, in a second it was gone, and he was not this picture nor the other, but as we know him every day."

"She didn't see?" asked Eugene.

"No."

"Thank God!" he cried. Then in a moment, recollecting himself, he looked at the two men, and saw what he had done. They tried to look as if they noticed nothing.

"You must destroy that thing, Morewood," said he.

Morewood's face was a study.

"I would as soon," he said deliberately, "cut off my right hand."

"I'll give you a thousand pounds for it," said Eugene.

"What would you do with it?"

"Burn it."

"Then you shouldn't have it for ten thousand."

"I thought you'd say that. But he mustn't see it."

"Why, Lane, you're as bad as a child. It's a man in love, that's all."

"If he saw it," said Eugene, "he'd hang himself."

"Oh, gently!" said Ayre. "If you ask me, I expect Stafford will pretty soon get beyond any surprise at the revelation. He must walk his path, like all of us. It can't matter to you, you know," he added, with a sharp glance.

"No, it can't matter to me," said Eugene steadily.

"Put it away, Morewood, and come out of doors. Perhaps you'd better not leave it about, at present at any rate."

Morewood took down the picture and placed it in a large portfolio, which he locked, and accompanied Ayre. Eugene made no motion to come with them, and they left him sitting there.

"The atmosphere," said Sir Roderick, looking up into the clear summer sky, "is getting thundery and complicated. I hate complications! They're a bore! I think I shall go."

"I sha'n't. It will be interesting."

"Perhaps you're right. I'll stay a little while."

"Ah! here you are. I've been looking for somebody to amuse me."

The speaker was Claudia, looking very fresh and cool in her soft white dress.

"What have you done with the pope?" asked Ayre.

"He gave me to understand he had wasted enough time on me, and went in to write."

"I should think he was right," said Sir Roderick.

"I dare say," said Claudia carelessly.

Her conscience was evidently quite at ease; but they did not know whether this meant that her actions had deserved no blame. However, they were neither of them men to judge such a case as hers harshly.

"If I were fifteen years younger," said Ayre, "I would waste all my time on you."

"Why, you're only about forty," said Claudia. "That's not too old."

"Good!" said he, smiling. "Life in the old dog yet, eh? But go in and see Lane. He's in the billiard-room thinking over his sins and getting low-spirited."

"And I shall be a change?"

"I don't know about that. Perhaps he's a homœopathist."

"I hate you!" said Claudia, with a very kind glance, as she pursued her way in the direction indicated.

"She means no harm," said Morewood.

"But she may do the devil of a lot. We can't help it, can we?"

"No—not our business if we could," said Morewood.

Claudia paused for a moment at the door. Eugene was still sitting with his head on his hand.

"It's very odd," thought she. "What's he looking at the easel for? There's nothing on it!"

Then she began to sing. Eugene looked up.

"Is it you, Lady Claudia?"

"Yes. Why are you moping here?"

"Where's Stafford?"

"Everybody," said Claudia impatiently, throw-

ing her hat, and herself after it, on a lounge, "asks me where Father Stafford is. I don't know, Mr. Lane; and what's more, at this moment I don't care. Have you nothing better than that to say to me when I come to look for you?"

Eugene pulled himself together. Tragedy airs would be insufferable.

"True, most beauteous damsel!" he said. "I am remiss. For the purposes of the moment, hang Stafford! What shall we do?"

She got up and came close to him.

"Mr. Lane," she whispered, "what do you think there is in the stable?"

"I know what there isn't; that's a horse fit to ride."

"A libel! a libel! But there is [in a still lower whisper] a *sociable*."

"A what?"

"A sociable."

"Do you mean a tricycle?"

"Yes—for two."

"Oho!" said Eugene, gently chuckling.

"Wouldn't it be fun?"

"On the road?"

"N—no, perhaps not; round the park."

"Hush! S'death! if Kate saw us! Where is she?"

"I saw her last with Mr. Haddington."

"In the scheme of creation everything has its use," replied Eugene tranquilly. "Haddington supplies a felt want."

"Be quiet. But will you?"

"Yes; come along. Be swift and silent."

"I must go and put on an old frock."

"All right; be quick."

"What is the use?" Eugene pondered; "I can't have her, and Stafford may as well—if he will. Will he, I wonder? And would she? Oh, Lord! what a nuisance they are! By Jove! I should like to see Kate's face if she spots us."

A few minutes later the strange and unedifying sight of Lady Claudia Territon and Mr. Lane, mounted on a very rickety old "sociable," presented itself to the gaping gaze of several labourers in the park. Claudia was in her most boisterous spirits; Eugene, by one of the quick transitions of his nature, was hardly less elate. Up-hill they toiled and down-hill they raced, getting, as the manner of "cyclists" is, very warm and rather oily. But retribution lagged not. Down a steep hill they came, round a sharp turn they went, and, alas, over into a ditch they fell. This was bad enough, but in the calm seclusion of a garden seat, perched on a knoll just above them, the sinners, as they rose, dirty but unhurt, beheld Miss Bernard! For a moment all was consternation. What would she say?

It was a curious thing, but Kate seemed as embarrassed as themselves, and she said nothing except:

"Oh, I hope you're not hurt!" and said this in a hasty way and with ostentatious amiability.

Eugene was surprised. But as his eyes wandered, they fell on Haddington, and that rising politician held awkwardly in his hand, and was trying to convey behind his back, what looked very like a lady's glove. Now Miss Bernard had only one glove on.

"The battery is spiked," he whispered triumphantly. "Come along, Lady Claudia."

Claudia hadn't seen what Eugene had, but she obeyed, and off they went again, airily waving their hands.

"What's the matter with her?" she asked. Eugene was struggling with laughter.

"Didn't you see? Haddington had her glove! Splendid!"

Claudia, regardless of safety, turned for an instant a flushed, smiling face to him. He was about to speak, but she turned away again, exclaiming:

"Quick! I've promised to meet Father Stafford at twelve, and I mustn't keep him waiting. I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

Eugene was checked; Claudia saw it. What she thought is not revealed, but they returned home in somewhat gloomy silence. And it is a comfort to the narrator, and it is to be hoped to the reader, to think that Mr. Eugene Lane got something besides pleasure out of his discreditable performance and his lamentable want of proper feeling.

CHAPTER V

HOW THREE GENTLEMEN ACTED FOR THE BEST

THE schemers schemed and the waiters upon events waited with considerable patience, but although the days wore on, the situation showed little signs of speedy development. Matters were in fact in a rather puzzling position. The friendship and intimacy between Claudia and Stafford continued to increase. Eugene, whether in penitence or in pique, had turned with renewed zeal to his proper duties, and was no longer content to allow Kate to be monopolised by Haddington. The latter's attentions had indeed been in danger of becoming too marked, and it is, perhaps, not uncharitable to attribute Kate's apparent avoidance of them as much to considerations of expediency as of principle. At the same time, there was no coolness between Eugene and Haddington, and when his guest presented a valid excuse and proposed departure, Eugene met the suggestion with an obviously sincere opposition. Sir Roderick really could not make out what was going on. Now Sir Roderick disliked being puzzled; it conveyed a reflection on his acuteness, and he therefore was a sharer in the perturbation of mind that evidently afflicted some of his companions, in spite of their decorous behaviour. But contentment was not wanting in some hearts. Morewood was happy in the pursuit of his art and in arguments with Stafford; and Bob Territon had found refuge

in an energetic attempt to organise and train a Manor team to do battle with the village cricket club, headed as it had been for thirty years past by the Rector. Moreover, Stafford himself still seemed tranquil. It would have been difficult for most men to fail to understand their true position in such a case more fully than he, in spite of his usual penetration of vision, had succeeded in doing. But he was now in a strange country, and the landmarks of feeling whereby the experienced traveller on such paths can learn and note, even if he cannot check, his descent, were to Stafford unmeaning and empty of warning. Of course, he knew he liked Claudia's society; he found her talk at once a change, a rest, and a stimulus; he had even become aware that of all the people at the Manor, except his old friend and host, she had for him the most interest and attraction; perhaps he had even suffered at times that sense of vacancy of all the chairs when her chair was vacant that should have told him of his state if anything would. But he did not see; he was blind in this matter, even as, say, Ayre or Morewood would have proved blind if called upon to study and describe the mental process of a religious conversion. He was yet far from realising that an influence had entered his life in force strong enough to contend with that which had so long ruled him with undivided sway. It was the part of a friend to hope and try that he might go with his own heart yet a secret to him. So hoped Eugene. But Eugene, unnerved by self-suspicion, would not lift a finger to hasten his friend's departure, lest he should seem to himself, or be without perceiving it even himself, alert to save his friend, only

because his friend's salvation would be to his own comfort.

Sir Roderick Ayre, however, was not restrained by Eugene's scruples nor inspired by Eugene's devotion to Stafford. Stafford interested him, but he was not his friend, and Ayre did not understand, or, if truth be told, appreciate the almost reverential attitude which Eugene, usually so very devoid of reverence, adopted toward him. Ayre thought Stafford's vow nonsense, and that if he was in love with Claudia Territon there was no harm done.

"Many people have been," he said, "and many will be, before the little witch grows old and—no, by Jove! she'll never grow ugly!"

Trivial as the matter seemed, looked at in this light, it had yet enough of human interest about it to decide him to leave the grouse alone, and wait patiently for the partridges at Millstead. After all, he had shot grouse and most other things for thirty years; and, as he said, "The parson was a change, and the house deuced comfortable, and old Eugene a good fellow."

Now it came to pass one day that the devil, having a spare hour on his hands, and remembering that he had often met with a hospitable reception from Sir Roderick, to say nothing of having a bowing acquaintance with Morewood, looked in at the Manor, and finding his old quarters at Sir Roderick's swept and garnished, incontinently took up his abode there, and proceeded to look round for some suitable occupation. When this momentous but invisible event accomplished itself, Sir Roderick was outwardly engaged in the innocent and aimless pursuit of knocking the billiard balls about and listening absently to a discourse from More-

wood on the essential truths which he (Morewood) had grasped and presented alone of modern artists. The theme was not exhilarating, and Sir Roderick's tenant soon grew very tired of it; the presentment of truth, indeed, essential or otherwise, not being a matter that concerned him. But in the course of an inspection of Sir Roderick's consciousness, he had come across something that appeared worth following up, and toward it he proceeded to direct his entertainer's conversation.

"I say, Morewood," said Ayre, breaking in on the discourse, "do you think it's fair to keep that fellow Stafford in the dark?"

"Is he in the dark?"

"It's a queer thing, but he is. I never knew a man who was in love before without knowing it,—they say women are that way,—but then I never met a 'Father' before."

"What do you propose, since you insist on gossiping?"

"It isn't gossip; it's Christian feeling. Some one ought to tell the poor beggar."

"Perhaps you'd like to."

"I should, but it would seem like a liberty, and I never take liberties. You do constantly, so you might as well take this one."

"I like that! Why, the man's a stranger! If he ought to be told at all, Lane's the man to do it."

"Yes, but you see, Lane——"

"That's quite true; I forgot. But isn't he better left alone to get over it?"

Sir Roderick, unprejudiced, might have conceded the point. But the prompter intervened.

"What I'm thinking about is this: is it fair to her? I don't say she's in love with him, but she

admires him immensely. They're always together, and—well, it's plain what's likely enough to happen. If it does, what will be said? Who'll believe he did it unconsciously? And if he breaks her heart, how is it better because he did it unconsciously?"

"You are unusually benevolent," said Morewood drily.

"Hang it! a man has some feelings."

"You're a humbug, Ayre!"

"Never mind what I am. You won't tell him?"

"No."

"It would be a very interesting problem."

"It would."

"That vow of his is all nonsense, ain't it?"

"Utter nonsense!"

"Why shouldn't he have his chance of being happy in a reasonable way? I shouldn't wonder if she took him."

"No more should I."

"Upon my soul, I believe it's a duty! I say, Morewood, do you think he'd see it for himself from the picture?"

"Of course he would. No one could help it."

"Will you let him see it?"

Morewood took a turn or two up and down, tugging his beard. The issue was doubtful. A certain auditor of the conversation, perceiving this, hastily transferred himself from one interlocutor to the other.

"I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll let him see it if Lane agrees. I'll leave it to Lane."

"Rather rough on Lane, isn't it?"

"A little strong emotion of any kind won't do Lane any harm."

"Perhaps not. We will train our young friend's mind to cope with moral problems. He'll never get on in the world nowadays unless he can do that. It's now part of a gentleman's—still more of a lady's—education."

Eugene was clearly wanted. By some agency, into which it is needless to inquire, though we may have suspicions, at that moment Eugene strolled into the billiard-room.

"We have a little question to submit to you, my dear fellow," said Ayre blandly.

Eugene looked at him suspiciously. He had been a good deal worried the last few days, and had a dim idea that he deserved it, which deprived him of the sense of unmerited suffering—a most valuable consolation in time of trouble.

"It's about Stafford. You remember the head of him Morewood did, and the conclusion we drew from it—or, rather, it forced upon us?"

Eugene nodded, instinctively assuming his most nonchalant air.

"We think he's a bad case. What think you?"

"I agree—at least, I suppose I do. I haven't thought much about it."

Ayre thought the indifference overdone, but he took no notice of it.

"We are inclined to think he ought to be shown that picture. I am clear about it; Morewood doubts. And we are going to refer it to you."

"You'd better leave me out."

"Not at all. You're a friend of his, known him all your life, and you'll know best what will be for his good."

"If you insist on asking me, I think you had better let it alone."

"Wait a minute. Why do you say that?"

"Because it will be a shock to him."

"No doubt, at first. He's got some silly notion in his head about not marrying, and about it's being sinful to fall in love, and all that."

"It won't make him happier to be refused."

Ayre leant forward in his chair, and said:

"How do you know she'll refuse him?"

"I don't know. How should I know?"

"Do you think it likely?"

"Is that a fair question?" asked Morewood.

"Perfectly," said Eugene, with an expressionless face. "But it's one I have no means of answering."

"He's plucky," thought Ayre. "Would you give the same answer you gave just now if you thought she'd take him?"

"It was certainly hard on Eugene. Was he bound, against even a tolerably strong feeling of his own, to give Stafford every chance? It is not fair to a man to make him a judge where he is in truth a party. Ayre had no mercy for him.

"For the sake of a trumpery pledge is he to throw away his own happiness—and mark you, Lane, perhaps hers?"

Eugene did not wince.

"If there's a chance of success, he ought to be given the opportunity of exercising his own judgment," he said quietly. "It would distress him immensely, but we should have no right to keep it from him. And I suppose there's always a chance of success."

"Go and get the picture, Morewood," said Sir Roderick. Then, when the painter was looking in the portfolio, he said abruptly to Eugene:

"You could say nothing else."

"No. That's why you asked me, I suppose. I hope I'm an interesting subject. You dig pretty deep."

"Serves you right!" said Ayre composedly. "Why were you ever such an ass?"

"God knows!" groaned Eugene.

Morewood returned.

"He's due here in ten minutes to sit to me. Are you going to stay?"

"No. You be doing something else, and let that thing stand on the easel."

"Pleasant for me, isn't it?" asked Morewood.

"Are you ashamed of yourself for snatching it?"

"Not a bit."

"All right, then; what's the matter? Come along, Eugene. After all, you know you'll like showing it. For an outsider, like yourself, it's really a deuced clever little bit. Perhaps they will make you an Associate if Stafford will let you show it."

Morewood ignored the taunt, and sat down by the window on pretence of touching up a sketch. He had not been there long when he heard Stafford come in, and became conscious that he had caught sight of the picture. He did not look up, and heard no sound. A long pause followed. Then he felt a strong grip on his shoulder, and Stafford whispered:

"It is my face?"

"You see it is."

"You did it?"

"Yes. I ought to beg your pardon," and he looked up. Stafford was pale as death, and trembling.

"When?"

"A few days ago."

"On your oath—no, you don't believe that—on your honor, is it truth?"

"Yes, it is."

"You saw it—just as it is there?"

"Yes, it is exact. I had no right to take it or to show it you."

"What does that matter, man? Do you think I care about that? But—yes, it is true. God help me!"

"We have seen it, you know. It was time you saw it."

"Time, indeed!"

"Where's the harm?" asked Morewood, in a rough effort at comfort.

"The harm? But you don't understand. It is the face of a beast!"

"My dear fellow, that's stuff! It's only the face of a lover."

Stafford looked at him in a dazed way.

"I wish you'd let me go back to my room, Morewood, and give me that picture. No—I won't hurt it."

"Take it, then, and pull yourself together. What's the harm, again I say? And if she loves you——"

"What?" he cried eagerly. Then, checking himself, "Hold your peace, in Heaven's name, and let me go!"

He went his way, and Morewood leaped from the window to find the other two. He found them, but not alone. Ayre was discoursing to Claudia and appeared entirely oblivious of the occurrence which he had precipitated. Eugene was walking

up and down with Kate Bernard. It is necessary to listen to what the latter couple were saying.

"This is sad news, Kate," Eugene said. "Why are you going to leave us?"

"My aunt wants me to go with her to Buxton in September, and we're going to have a few days on the river before that."

"Then we shall not meet again for some time?"

"No. Of course I shall write to you."

"Thank you—I hope you will. You've had a pleasant time, I hope? Who are to be your river party?"

"Oh, just ourselves and one or two girls and men. Lord Rickmansworth is to be there a day or two, if he can. And—oh, yes, Mr. Haddington, I think."

"Isn't Haddington staying here?"

"I don't know. I understood not. So your party will break up," Kate went on. "Of course, Claudia can't stay when I go."

"Why not?"

"Really, Eugene, it would be hardly the thing."

"I believe my mother is not thinking of going."

"Do you mean you will ask Claudia?"

"I certainly cannot ask her to curtail her visit."

"Anyhow, Father Stafford goes soon, and she won't stay then."

This last shaft accomplished Miss Bernard's presumable object. Eugene lost his temper.

"Forgive me for saying so, Kate," he said, "but really at times your mind seems to me positively vulgar."

"I am not going to quarrel. I am quite aware of what you want."

"What's that?"

"An opportunity for quarrelling."

"If that's all, I might have found several. But come, Kate, it's no use, and not very dignified, to squabble. We haven't got on so well as we might. But I dare say it's my fault."

"Do you want to throw me over?" asked Kate scornfully.

"For Heaven's sake, don't talk like a breach-of-promise plaintiff! I am and always have been perfectly ready to fulfill my engagement. But you don't make it easy for me. Unless you 'throw me over,' as you are pleased to phrase it, things will remain as they are."

"I have been taught to consider an engagement as binding as a marriage."

"No warrant for such a view in Holy Scripture."

"And whatever my feelings may be—and you can hardly wonder if after your conduct they are not what they were—I shall consider myself bound."

"I have never proposed anything else."

"Your conduct with Claudia——"

"I must ask you to leave Lady Claudia alone. If you come to that—but there, I was just going to scratch back like a school-girl. Let us remember our manners, if nothing else."

"And our principles," added Kate haughtily.

"By all means, and forget our deviations from them. And now this conversation may as well end, may it not?"

Kate's only answer was to walk straight away to the house.

Eugene joined Claudia; Ayre, in his absence, had been reinforced by the accession of Bob Territon.

"Kate's going to-morrow," Eugene announced.

"So I heard," said Claudia. "We must go, too—we have been here a terrible time."

"Why?"

"It's all nonsense!" interposed Bob decisively; "we can't go for a week. The match is fixed for next Wednesday."

"But," said Claudia, "I'm not going to play."

"I am," said Bob. "And where do you propose to go to?"

"No, Lady Claudia," said Eugene, "you must see us through the great day. I really wish you would. The whole county's coming, and it will be too much for my mother alone, After the cricket-match, if you still insist, the deluge!"

"I'll ask Mrs. Lane. She'll tell me what to do."

"Good child!" said Sir Roderick. "I am going to stay right away till the birds. And as Lane says I ain't to have any birds unless I field at long-leg, I am going to field at long-leg."

"Splendid!" cried Claudia, clapping her hands; "Sir Roderick Ayre at a rustic cricket-match! Mr. Morewood shall sketch you."

"I've had enough of sketching just now," said Morewood. Ayre and Eugene looked up. Morewood nodded slightly.

"Where's Stafford?" asked Ayre.

"In his room—at work, I suppose. He put off my sitting."

"Never mind Father Stafford," said Claudia decisively. "Who is going to play tennis? I shall play with Sir Roderick."

"I'd much rather sit still in the shade," pleaded Sir Roderick.

"You're a very rude *old* gentleman! But you

must play, all the same—against Bob and Mr. Morewood."

"Where do I come in?" asked Eugene. "Mayn't I do anything, Lady Claudia?"

The others were looking after the net and the racquets, and Claudia was left with him for a moment.

"Yes," she said; "you may go and sit on Kate's trunks till they lock."

"Wait a little while; I will be revenged on you. I want, though, to ask you a question."

"Oh! Is it a question that no one else—say Kate, for instance—could help you with?"

"It's not about myself."

"Is it about me?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter, Mr. Lane? Is it anything serious?"

"Very."

"Nonsense!" said Claudia. "You really mustn't do it, Mr. Lane, or I can't stay for the cricket-match."

"We shall be desolate. Stafford's going in a few days."

But Claudia's face was entirely guileless as she replied:

"Is he? I'm so sorry! But he's looking much stronger, isn't he?"

With which she departed to join Sir Roderick, who had been spending the interval in extracting from Morewood an account of Stafford's behaviour.

"Hard hit, was he?" he concluded.

"He looked it."

"Wonder what he'll do! I'll give you five to four he asks her."

"Done!" said Morewood; "in fives."

CHAPTER VI

FATHER STAFFORD KEEPS VIGIL

DINNER that evening at the Manor was not a very brilliant affair. Stafford did not appear, pleading that it was a Friday, and a strict fast for him. Kate was distinctly out of temper, and treated the company in general, and Eugene in particular, with frigidity. Everybody felt that the situation was somewhat strained, and in consequence the pleasant flow of personal talk that marks parties of friends was dried up at its source. The discussion of general topics was found to be a relief.

"The utter uselessness of such a class as Ayre represents," said Morewood emphatically, taking up a conversation that had started no one quite knew how, "must strike every sensible man."

"At least they buy pictures," said Eugene.

"On the contrary, they now sell old masters, and empty the pockets of would-be buyers."

"They are very ornamental," remarked Claudia.

"In some cases, undoubtedly," said Morewood.

"If you mean a titled class," said Ayre, "I quite agree. I object to titles. They only confuse ranks. A sweep is made a lord, and outsiders think he's a gentleman."

"Come, you're a baronet yourself, you know," said Eugene.

"It's true," admitted Ayre, with a sigh; "but it happened a long while ago, and we've nearly lived it down."

"Take care they don't make you a peer!"

"I have passed a busy life in avoiding it. After all, there's a chance. I'm not a brewer or a lawyer, or anything of that kind. But still, the fear of it has paralysed my energies and compelled me to squander my fortune. They don't make poor men peers."

"That ought to have been allowed to weigh in the balance in favour of Dives," suggested Eugene.

"Not a bit," said Ayre. "Depend upon it, they kept it for him down below."

"I hate cynicism!" said Claudia, suddenly and aggressively.

Ayre put up his eye-glass.

"*Après?*"

"It's all affectation."

"Really, Lady Claudia, you might be quite old, from the way you talk. That is one of the illusions of age, which, by the way, have not received enough attention."

"That's very true," said Eugene. "Old people think the world better than it is because their faculties don't enable them to make such demands upon it."

"My dear Eugene," said Mrs. Lane pertinently, "what can you know about it? As we grow old we grow charitable."

"And why is that?" asked Morewood; "not because you think better of other people, but because you know more of yourself."

"That is so," said Ayre. "Standing midway between youth and age, I am an arbiter. You judge others by yourself. In youth you have an unduly good opinion of yourself, that unduly depresses

your opinion of others. In age it's the opposite way. But who knows which is more wrong?"

"At least let us hope age is right, Sir Roderick," said Mrs. Lane.

"By all means," said he.

"All this doesn't touch my point," said Claudia. "You are accounting for it as if it existed. My point was that it didn't exist. I said it was all affectation."

"And not the only sort of affectation of the same kind!" said Kate Bernard, with remarkable emphasis.

Sir Roderick enjoyed a troubled sea. Turning to Kate, with a rapid side glance at Claudia on the way, he said:

"That's interesting. How do you mean, Miss Bernard?"

"All attempts to put one's self forward, to be peculiar, and so on, are the same kind of affectation, and are odious—especially in women."

There was nothing very much in the words, and Kate was careful to look straight in front of her as she uttered them. Still they told.

"You mean," said Ayre, "there may be an affection of freshness and enthusiasm—gush, in fact—as bad, or worse, than cynicism, and really springing from the same root?"

Kate had not arrived at any such definite meaning, but she nodded her head.

"An assumed sprightliness," continued Ayre cheerfully, "perhaps coquettishness?"

"Exactly," Kate assented, "and a way of pushing into conversations which my mother used to say girls had better let alone."

This was tolerably direct, but it did not satisfy

Ayre's malicious humour, and he was on the point of a new question when Haddington, who had taken no part in the previous conversation, but had his reasons for interfering now, put in suavely:

"If Miss Bernard and you, Ayre, will forgive me, are we not wandering from the point?"

"Was there any point to wander from?" suggested Eugene.

So they drifted through the evening, skirting the coast of quarrels and talking of everything except that of which they were thinking. Verily, love affairs do not always conduce to social enjoyment —more especially other people's love affairs. Still, Sir Roderick Ayre was entertained.

Meanwhile, Stafford sat in his room alone, save for the company of his own picture. He was like a man who has been groping his way through difficult paths in the dark—uneasy, it may be, and nervous, but with no serious alarm. On a sudden, a storm-flash may reveal to him that he is on the very edge of a precipice or already ankle-deep in some bottomless morass. The sight of his own face, interpreted with all Morewood's penetrating insight and mastery of hand, had been a revelation to him. No more mercilessly candid messenger could have been found. Arguments he would have resisted or confuted; appeals to his own consciousness would have failed for want of experience; he could not affect to disbelieve the verdict of his own countenance. He had in all his life been a man who dealt plainly with himself; it was only in this last matter that the power, more than the will, to understand his own heart had failed him. His intellect now reasserted itself. He did not attempt to blink facts; he did not deny the

truth of the revelation or seek to extenuate its force. He did not tell himself that the matter was a trifle, or that its effect would be transient. He recognised that he had fallen from the state of a priest vowed to Heaven, to that of a man whose whole heart and mind had gone out in love for a woman and were filled with her image. His judgment of himself was utterly reversed, his presuppositions confounded, his scheme of life wrecked; all this he knew for truth, unless indeed it might be that victory could still be his—victory after a struggle even to death; a struggle that had found no type or forecast in the mimic contests that had marked, almost without disturbing, his earlier progress on the road of his choice.

In the long hours that he sat gazing at the picture his mind was the scene of changing moods. At first the sense of horror and shame was paramount. He was aghast at himself and too full of self-abhorrence to do more than fight blindly away from what he could not but see. He would fain have lost his senses if only to buy the boon of ignorance. Then this mood passed. The long habit of his heart asserted itself, and he fell on his knees, no longer in horror, but in abasement and penitence. Now all his thought was for the sin he had done to Heaven and to his vow; but had he not learnt and taught, and re-learnt in teaching, that there was no sin without pardon, if pardon were sought? And for a moment, not peace, but the far-off possible hope and prospect of peace regained comforted his spirit. It might be yet that he would come through the dark valley, and gaze with his old eyes on the light of his life set in the sky.

But was his sin only against Heaven and his vow and himself? Is sin so confined? If Morewood had seen, had not others? Had not she seen? Would not the discovery he had made come to her also? Nay, had it not come? He had been blind; but had she? Was it not far more likely that she had not deceived herself as to the tendency of their friendship, nor dreamt that he meant anything except what his acts, words, and looks had so plainly—yes, to his own eyes now, so plainly declared? He looked back on her graciousness, her delight in his society, her unconcealed admiration for him. What meaning had these but one? What did she know of his vow? Why should she dream of anything save the happy ending of the story that flits before the half-averted eyes of a girl when she is with her lover? Even if she had heard of his vow, would they not all tell her it was a conceit of youth, a spiritual affectation, a thing that a wise counsellor would tell him and her quietly to set aside? Did it not all point to this? He was not only a perjurer toward Heaven, but his sin had brought woe and pain to her he loved.

So he groaned in renewed self-condemnation. But what did that mean? And then an irresistible tide of triumph swept over him, obliterating shame and horror and remorse. She loved him. He had won. Be it good or evil, she was his! Who forbade his joy? Though all the world, aye, and all Heaven, were against him, nothing should stop him. Should he sin for naught? Should he not have the price of his soul? Should he not enjoy what he had bought so dearly? Enough of talking, and enough of reasoning! Passion filled

him, and he knew no good nor evil save its satiety or hunger.

The mad mood passed, and there came a worthier mind. He sat and looked along the avenue of his life. He saw himself walking hand in hand with her. Now she was not the instrument of his pleasure, but the helper in his good deeds. By her sweet influence he was stronger to do well; his broader sympathies and fuller life made a servant more valuable to his Master; he would serve Heaven as well and man better, and, knowing the common joys of man, he would better minister to common pains. Who was he that he should claim to lead a life apart, or arrogate to himself an immunity and an independence other men had not? Man and woman created He them, and did it not make for good? And he sank back in his chair, with the picture of a life before him, blessed and giving blessings, and ending at last in an old age, when she would still be with him, when he should be the head and inspiration of a house wherein God's service was done, when he should see his son's sons following in his steps, and so, having borne his part, fall asleep, to wake again to an union wherein were no stain of earth and no shadow of parting.

From these musings he awoke with a shudder, as there came back to him many a memory of lofty pitying words, with which he had gently drawn aside the cloak of seemliness wherein some sinner had sought to wrap his sin. His dream of the perfect joint-life, what was it but a sham tribute to decency, a threadbare garment for the hideousness of naked passion? Had he taught himself to contemplate such a life, and shaped himself for it, it

might be a worthy life—not the highest, but good for men who were not made for saints. But as it was, it seemed to him but a glazing over of his crime. Sternly there stood between him and it his profession and his pledge. If he would forsake the one and violate the other, by Heaven, he would do it boldly, and not seek to slink out by such self-cozening. At least he would not deceive himself again. If he sinned, he would sin openly to his own heart. There should be no compact: nothing but defeat or victory! And yet, was he right? It would be pitiful if for pride's sake, if for fear of the sneers of men, he were to kill her joy and defile his own soul with her heart's blood. People would laugh at the converted celibate—was it that he feared? Had he fallen so low as that? or was the shrinking he felt not rather the dread that his fall would be a stone of stumbling to others? for in his infatuation he had assumed to be an example. Was there no distinguishing good and evil? Could every motive and every act change form and colour as you looked at it, and be now the counsel of Heaven and now the prompting of Satan? How, then, could a man choose his path? In his bewilderment the darkness closed round him, and he groaned aloud.

It was late now, nearly midnight, and the house was quiet. Stafford walked to the open window and leant out, bending his tired head upon his hand. As he looked out he saw through the darkness Eugene and Ayre still sitting on the terrace. Ayre was talking.

"Yes," he was saying, "we are taught to think ourselves of a mighty deal of importance. How we fare and what we do is set before us as a thing

about which angels rejoice or mourn. The state of our little minds, or souls, or whatever it is, is a matter of deep care to the Creator—the Life of the universe. How can it be? How are we more than minutest points in that picture in His mind, which is the world? I speak in human metaphor, as one must speak. In truth, we are at once a fraction, a tiny fraction—oh! what a tiny fraction—of the picture, and the like little jot of what it exists for. And does what comes to us matter very much —whether we walk a little more or a little less cleanly—aim a little higher or lower, if there is a higher and lower? What matter? Ah, Eugene, our parents and our pastors teach us vanity! To me it seems pitiful. Let us take our little sunshine, doing as little harm and giving as little pain as we may, living as long as we can, and doing our little bit of useful work for the ground when we are dead, if we did none for the world when we were living. If you cremate, you will deprive many people of their only utility."

Eugene gently laughed.

"Of course you put it as unattractively as you can."

"Yes; but I can't put it unattractively enough to be true. I used to fret and strive, and think archangels hung on my actions. There are none; and if there were, what would they care for me? I am a part of it, I suppose—a part of the Red King's dream, as Alice says. But what a little part! I do well if I suffer little and give little suffering, and so quietly go to help the cabbages."

"I don't think I believe it," said Eugene.

"I suppose not. It's hard to believe and impossible to disbelieve."

Stafford listened intently. Memories came back to him of books he had read and put behind him; books wherein Ayre had found his creed, if the thing could be called a creed. Was that true? Was he rending his soul for nothing? A day earlier such a thought would have been to him at once a torture and a sin. Now he found a strange comfort in it. Why strive and cry, when none watched the effort or heard the agony? Why torture himself? Why torture others? If the world were good, why was he not to have his part? If it were bad, might he not find a quiet nook under the wall, out of the storm? Why must he try to breast it? If Ayre was right, what a tragical farce his struggle was, what a perverse delusion, what an aimless flinging away of the little joy his little life could offer! If this were so, then was he indeed alone in the world—except for Claudia. Was his choice in truth between this world and the next? He might throw one away and never find the other.

Then he cursed the voice, and himself for listening to it, and fell again to vehement prayers and self-reproaches, trying to drown the clamour of his heart with his insistent petitions. If he could only pray as he had been wont to pray, he was saved. There lay a respite from thought and a refuge from passion. Why could he not abandon his whole soul to communion with God, as once he could, shutting out all save the sense of sin and the conviction of forgiveness? He prayed for power to pray. But, like the guilty king, he could not say Amen. He could not bind his wandering thoughts, nor dispel the froward imaginings of his distempered mind. He asked one thing, and in his

heart desired another; he prayed, and did not desire an answer to his prayer; for when he tried to bow his heart in supplication, ever in the midst, between him and the throne before which he bent, came the form and the face and the voice he loved, and the temptation and the longing and the doubt. And he was tost and driven about through the live-long night till, in utter weariness, he fell on the floor and slept.

CHAPTER VII

AN EARLY TRAIN AND A MORNING'S AMUSEMENT

It was still early when he awoke, weary, stiff, and unrefreshed, but with a conviction in his mind that had grown plain and strong in the mysterious way notions sometimes seem to gather force in hours of unconsciousness, and surprise us with their mature vigour when we awake. "I must go!" he kept muttering to himself; "I must go—go and think. I dare do nothing now." He hastily packed a handbag, wrote a note for Eugene, asking that the rest of his luggage might be forwarded to an address he would send, went quietly downstairs, and, finding the door just opened, passed out unseen. He had three miles to walk to the station, but his restless feet brought him there quickly, and he had more than a hour to wait for the first train, at half-past eight. He sat down on the platform and waited. His capacity for thought and emotion seemed for the time exhausted. His thoughts wandered from one trivial matter to another, always eluding his effort to fix them. He found himself acutely studying the gang of labourers who were going by train to their day's work, and wondering how many pipes each of their carefully guarded matches would light, and what each carried in his battered tin drinking-bottle, remembering with a dreary sort of amusement that he had heard this same incurable littleness of thought settled on

men condemned to death. Still, it passed the time, and he was surprised out of a sort of reverie by the clanging of the porter's inharmonious bell.

At the same moment a phaeton was rapidly driven up to the door of the station, and all the porters rushed to meet it.

"Label it all for London," he heard Eugene's voice say. "Four boxes, a portmanteau, and a hat-box. No, I'm not going—this lady and gentleman."

Kate, Haddington, and Eugene came through the ticket-office on to the platform. Stafford involuntarily shrank back.

"Just in time!" Eugene was saying; "though why the dickens you people will start at such an hour, I don't know. Haddington, I suppose, always must be in a hurry—never does for a rising man to admit he's got spare time. But you, Kate! It's positively uncomplimentary!"

He spoke lightly, but there was a troubled look on his face; and as Haddington went off to take the tickets he drew near to Kate, and said suddenly:

"You are determined on this, Kate?"

"On what?" she asked coldly.

"Why, to go like this—to bolt—it almost comes to that—leaving things as they are between us?"

"Why not?"

"And with Haddington?"

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"Of course not. But how do you think it must look to me? What do you imagine my course must be?"

"Really, Eugene, I see no need for this scene. I suppose your course will be to wait till I ask you

to fulfill your promise, and then to fulfil it. You have no sort of cause for complaint."

Eugene could not resist a smile.

"You are sublime!" he said. Perhaps he would have said more, but at this moment, to his intense surprise, his eyes met Stafford's. The latter gave him a quick look, in obedience to which he checked his exclamation, and, making some excuse about a parcel due and not arrived, unceremoniously handed Kate to a carriage, bundled Haddington in after her, and walked rapidly to the front of the train, where he had just seen Stafford getting into a third-class compartment.

"What in the world's the meaning of this, my dear old boy?"

"I have left a note for you."

"That will explain?"

"No," said Stafford, with his unsparing truthfulness, "it will not explain."

"How fagged you look!"

"Yes, I am tired."

"You must go now, and like this?"

"I think that is less bad than anything else."

"You can't tell me?"

"Not now, old fellow. Perhaps I will some day."

"You'll let me know what you're doing? Hallo, she's off! And, Stafford, nothing ever between us?"

"Why should there be?" he answered, with some surprise. "But you know there couldn't be."

The train moved on as they shook hands, and Eugene retraced his steps to his phaeton.

"He's given her up," he said to himself, with an

irrepressible feeling of relief. "Poor old fellow! Now——"

But Eugene's reflections were not of a character that need or would repay recording. He ought to have been ashamed of himself. I venture to think he was. Nevertheless, he arrived home in better spirits than a man has any right to enjoy when he has seen his mistress depart in a temper and his best friend in sorrow. Our spirits are not always obedient to the dictates of propriety. It is often equally in vain that we call them from the vasty deep, or try to dismiss them to it. They are rebellious creatures, whose only merit is their sincerity.

Sir Roderick Ayre allowed few things to surprise him, but the fact of any one deliberately starting by the early train was one of the few. In regard to such conduct, he retained all his youthful capacity for wonder. Surprise, however, gave way to unrestrained and indecent exultation when he learned that the early party had consisted of Kate and Haddington, and that Eugene himself had escorted them to the station. Eugene was in too good a temper to be seriously annoyed.

"I know it makes me look an ass," he said, as they smoked the after-breakfast pipe, "but I suppose that's all in the day's work."

"No doubt. It is the day's work," said Ayre; "but, oh, diplomatic young man, why didn't you tell us at breakfast that the pope had also gone?"

"Oh, you know that?"

"Of course. My man Timmins brings me what I may call a way-bill every morning, and against Stafford's name was placed '8.30 train.'"

"Useful man, Timmins," said Eugene. "Did he happen to add why he had gone?"

"There are limitations even to Timmins. He did not."

"You can guess?"

"Well, I suppose I can," answered Ayre, with some resentment.

"He's given it up, apparently."

"I don't know."

"He must have. Awfully cut up he looked, poor old chap! I was glad Kate and Haddington didn't see him."

"Poor chap! He takes it hard. Hallo! here's the *fons et origo mali.*"

Morewood joined them.

"I have been," he said gravely, "rescuing my picture. That inspired lunatic had wrapped it up in brown paper, and put it among his socks in his portmanteau. I couldn't see it anywhere till I routed out the portmanteau. If it had come to grief I should have entered the Academy."

"Don't give way so," said Ayre; "it's unmanly. Control your emotions."

Eugene rose.

"Where are you going?"

Eugene smiled.

"This," said Ayre to Morewood, with a wave of his hand, "is an abandoned young man."

"It is," said Morewood. "Bob Territon is going rat-hunting, and proposes we shall also go. What say you?"

"I say yes," said Sir Roderick, with alacrity. "It's a beastly cruel sport."

"You have lost," said Morewood, as they walked away together.

"Wait a bit!" said his companion. "But, young Eugene! It's a pity that young man has no morals."

"Is that so?"

"Oh! not *simpliciter*, you know. *Secundum quid.*"

"*Secundum feminam*, in fact?"

"Yes; and I brought him up, too."

"'By their fruits ye shall know them.' But here's Bob and the terriers."

"Don't you fellows ever have a sister," said Bob, as he came up; "Claudia's just savage because the pope's gone. Can't get her morning absolution, you know."

"Are absolution and ablution the same word, Morewood?" asked Ayre.

"Don't know. Ask the Rector. He's sure to turn up when he hears of the rats."

"I think they must be—a sort of spiritual tub. But Morewood will never admit he's been educated. It detracts from his claim to genius."

Eugene, freed from this frivolous company, was not long in discovering Claudia's whereabouts. He felt like a boy released from school and, turning his eyes away from future difficulties, was determined to enjoy himself while he could. Claudia was seated on the lawn in complete idleness and, apparently, considerable discontent.

"Do your guests always scurry away without saying good-bye to anybody, Mr. Lane?" she asked.

"I hope that you, at least, will not. But didn't Kate say good-bye, or Haddington?"

"I meant Father Stafford, of course."

"Oh, he had to go. He sent an apology to you and all the party."

"Did he tell you why he had to go?"

"No," said Eugene, regarding her with covert attention.

"It's a pity if he's unaccountable. I like him so much otherwise."

"You don't like unaccountable people?"

Claudia seemed quite willing to let Stafford drop out of the conversation.

"No," she said; "I tolerate you, Mr. Lane, because I always know exactly what you'll do."

"Do you?" he asked, only moderately pleased. A man likes to be thought a little mysterious. No doubt Claudia knew that.

"I don't think you know what I am going to do now."

"What?"

"I'm going to ask you if you know why Father Stafford——"

"Oh, please, excuse me, Mr. Lane. I can't speculate on your friend's motives. I don't profess to understand him."

This might be indifference; it sounded to Eugene very like pique.

"I thought you might know."

"Mr. Lane," said Claudia, "either you mean something or you don't. If the one, you're taking a liberty, and one entirely without excuse; if the other, you are simply tedious."

"I beg your pardon," said Eugene stiffly.

Claudia gave a little laugh.

"Why do you make me be so aggressive? I don't want to be. Was I awfully severe?"

"Yes, rather."

"I meant it, you know. But did you come quite resolved to quarrel? *I* want to be pleasant." And Claudia raised her eyes with a reproachful glance.

"In anger or otherwise, you are always delightful," said Eugene politely.

"I accept that as a diplomatic advance—not in its literal sense. After all, I must be nice to you. You're all alone this morning."

"Lady Claudia," said he gravely, "either you mean something or you do not. If the one——"

"Be quiet this moment!" she said, laughing.

He obeyed, and lay back in his low chair with a sigh of content.

"Yes; never mind Stafford and never mind Kate. Why should we? They're not here."

"My silence is not to be taken for consent," said Claudia, "only it's too fine a day to spend in trying to improve you or, indeed, anybody else. But I shall not forget any of my friends."

Now up to this point Eugene had behaved tolerably well. It is, however, a dangerous thing to set yourself deliberately to study a lady's attractions. Like all other one-sided views of a subject, it is apt to carry you too far. The sun and the wind were playing about in Claudia's hair, her eyes were full of light, and her whole air, in spite of a genuine effort after demureness, conveyed to any self-respecting man an irresistible challenge to make himself agreeable if he could. Eugene's notions of making himself agreeable were, as may have been gathered, liberal; they certainly included more than can be considered strictly incumbent on young men in society. And, besides being polite, Eugene was also curious. It is one thing to silently suffer under a passion which a sense of duty forbids; such a position has its pleasures. The situation is altered when the idea dawns upon you that there is no reciprocity of graceful suffering; that, in

fact, the lady may prefer somebody else. Eugene wanted to know where he stood.

"Shall you be sorry to leave here?" he asked.

"My feelings will be mixed. You see, Rickmansworth has actually consented to take me with him to his moor, and that will be great fun."

"Why, you don't go killing birds?"

"No, I don't kill birds."

"There'll be only a pack of men there."

"That's all. But I don't mind that—if the scenery is good."

"I believe you're trying to make me angry."

"Oh, no! I know Sir Roderick doesn't let you be angry. It's not good form."

"Have you no heart, Claudia?"

"I don't know. But I have a prefix."

"Have you, after ten years' friendship?"

Claudia laughed.

"You make me rather old. Were we friends when I was ten?"

"Oh, bother dates! I don't count by time."

"Really, Mr. Lane, if you were anybody else I should call this absurd. It would be flattering you and myself to call it wrong."

"Why?"

"Because that would imply you were serious."

"Would it be wrong if I were?"

"Well, it would be generally considered so, under the circumstances."

"I don't care about that. I have endured it long enough. O Claudia! don't you see?"

"I suppose," thought Claudia, "I ought to crush him at this point. I think I'll wait a little bit, though."

"See what?" she said.

"Why, that—that——"

"Well?"

"Hang it! why is it always so abominably absurd? Why, that I love the ground you tread on, Claudia? Is this wretched thing to keep us apart?"

"Mr. Lane, you're magnificent; but isn't there a trifling assumption in your last remark?"

"How?"

"Well, you seemed—perhaps you didn't mean it—to imply that only that 'wretched thing' kept *us* apart. That's rather taking me for granted, isn't it?"

"Ah! you know I didn't mean it. But if things were different, could you——"

"A conditional proposal is a new fashion. Is that one of Sir Roderick's ideas?"

Eugene was at last angry. He was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"I see. I must congratulate you."

"On what?"

"On having bagged a brace—without accident to yourself. But I have had enough of it."

And without waiting for a reply to this very rude speech, he rose and flung himself across the lawn into the house.

Claudia seemed less angry than she ought to have been. She sat with a little smile for a moment, then she threw her hat in the air and caught it, then lay back, sighed gently, and murmured:

"Heigho! a brace means two, doesn't it? Who's the other? Oh! Mr. Haddington, I suppose. I didn't think he knew. Poor Eugene! He's very angry, or he'd never have been so rude. 'Bagged a brace!'"

And she actually laughed again, and then said "Heigho!" again.

Just at this moment Ayre came up the drive, looking very hot and very disgusted. Seeing Claudia, he came and sat down.

"Bob's rat-hunting's a mere fraud," he said. "I was there half-an-hour, and we only bagged a brace."

"What a curious coincidence!" exclaimed Claudia.

"How a coincidence?"

"Oh, nothing. Bagging a brace means killing two, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, I wanted to know."

Ayre looked at her.

"Where's Eugene?'

"He was here just now, but he's gone into the house."

Ayre stroked his moustache meditatively.

"Did you want him?"

"No, not particularly. I thought I should find him here."

"You would if you'd come a little sooner."

"Ah! I'll go and find him."

"Yes, I should."

And off he went.

"It is really very pleasant," said Claudia, "to prevent Sir Roderick finding out things that he wants to find out. I think it does me credit—and it annoys him so very much. I will go and have a nice drive with Mrs. Lane, and see some old women. I feel as if I ought to do something proper."

And perhaps it was about time.

CHAPTER VIII

STAFFORD IN RETREAT, AND SIR RODERICK IN ACTION

When Stafford got into the train on his headlong flight from Millstead Manor, he had no settled idea of his destination, and he arrived in London without having made much progress toward a resolution. Not knowing what he wanted, he could not decide where he was most likely to find it. Did he want to forget or to think; to repent or to resolve? This is the alternative that presents itself to a mind puzzled to know whether its doubt is a concession to sin or a homage to reason. Stafford had been bred in a school widely different from that which treats all questions as open, and all to be referred to the verdict of the balance of expediency. Among other lessons, he had been taught a deep distrust of the instrument by which he was forced to guide his actions. But no training had succeeded in eradicating a strong mind's instinct of self-confidence, and if up till now he had committed no rebellion, it was because his reason had been rather a voluntary and eager helper than a captive or slave to the tribunal he distinguished from it by the name of conscience. With some surprise at himself—a surprise that now took the place of shame—he recognised that he was not ready to take everything for granted, that he must know that what he was flying from was in fact sin, not only

that it might be. That it was sin he fully believed, but he would be sure. So much triumph his passion extorted from him as he paced irresolutely up and down the square in front of Euston, after seeing Kate and Haddington safely away, while the porter and cabman wondered why the traveller seemed not sure where he wanted to go. Of their wonder and their irreverent suggestions he was supremely careless.

No, he would not go back at once to his active work. Not only did his health still forbid that—and, indeed, last night's struggle seemed to him to have undone most of the good he had gained from the quiet of Millstead—but, what was more, he believed, above all, in the importance of the state of the pastor's own soul, and was convinced that his work would be weak and futile done under such conditions; that, in theological language, there would be no blessing on it. When he had once reached that conclusion, his path was plain before him. He would go to the Retreat. This word Retreat has become familiar to those who study ecclesiastical items in the paper. But the Retreat Stafford had in his mind was not quite of the common kind. It had been founded by one of the leaders of his party, and was intended to serve the function of a spiritual casual ward, whither those who were for the moment at a loss might resort and find refuge until they had time to turn round. It was not a permanent home for any one. After his stay, the visitor returned to the world, if he would; if he were finally disabled he was passed on to a permanent residence of another kind. The Retreat was a temporary refuge only. Sometimes it was full, sometimes it was empty, save for the

Superintendent, as he was called; for religious terms were avoided, and a severe neutrality of description forbade the possibility of the Retreat itself seeming to take any side in the various mental battles for which it afforded a clear field, remote from interruption and from the bias alike of the world and of previous religious prepossessions. A man was entirely left to himself at the Retreat. Save at the dinner hour, no one spoke to him except the Superintendent. The rule of his office was that he should always be ready to listen on all subjects, and to talk on all indifferent subjects. Advice and exhortation were forbidden to him. If a man wanted the ordinary consolations of religion, his case was not the special case the Retreat was founded to meet. When nobody could help a man, and nothing was left for him but to go through with the struggle in his own soul, then he came to the Retreat. There he stayed till he reached some conclusion: that is, if he could reach one within a reasonable time; for the pretence of unconquerable hesitation was not received. When he arrived at his resolve, he went away: what the resolve was, and where he was going, whether to High or Low, to Rome or Islington, to Church or Dissent, or even to Mohammed or Theosophy, or what not, or nothing, nobody asked. Such a foundation had struck many devoted followers of the Founder as little better than a negation or an abdication. The Founder thought otherwise. "If forms and words are of any use to him, a man will never come," he said; "if he comes, let him alone." And it may be that this difference between the Founder and his disciples was due to the fact that the Founder believed that, given a fair field in any honest mind,

his views must prevail, whereas the disciples were not so strong in faith.

It is very possible the disciples were right, in a way; but still the Founder's scheme now and then caught a great prize that the disciples would have lost through their over-great meddling. The Founder would have repudiated the idea of differences in value between souls. But men sometimes act on ideas they repudiate, and with very good results.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the Retreat might be, it was just the place Stafford wanted. He shrank, almost with loathing, from the thought of exposing himself to well-meant ministrations from men who were his inferiors: the theory of the equalising effect of the sacred office, which appears to be held in great tranquillity by many who see the absurdity of parallel ideas applied in other spheres, was one of the fictions that proved entirely powerless over his mind at this juncture. He did not say to himself that fools were fools and blind men blind, whatever their office, degree, or profession, but he was driven to the Retreat by a thought that a brutal speaker might have rendered for him in those words without essential misrepresentation. Above all, he wanted quiet—time to understand the new forces and to estimate the good or evil of the new ideas.

Arriving there late in the evening of the same day on which he left Millstead, for the Retreat was situated on the borders of Exmoor and the journey from Paddington was long and slow, he was received by the Superintendent with the grave welcome and studious absence of questioning that was the rule of the house. The Superintendent was

an elderly man, inclining to stoutness and of unyielding placidity. It was suspected that the Founder had taken pains to choose a man who would observe his injunction of not meddling with thorny questions the more strictly from his own inability to understand them.

"We are very empty just now," he said, with a sigh. Poor man! perhaps it was dull. "Only two, besides yourself."

"The fewer the better," said Stafford, with a smile, half in earnest, half humouring the genius of the place.

The Superintendent looked as if he might have said something on the other side but refrained, and, without more ado, made Stafford at home in the bare little room that was to serve him for sleeping and living. Stafford was full of weariness, and sank down on the bed with a sense of momentary respite. He would not begin to think till to-morrow.

Here we must leave him to wage his uncertain battle. When the visible and the invisible meet in the shock of strife about the soul of a man, who may describe the changes and chances of the fight? In the peace of his chosen solitude would he reconquer the vision that the clouds had hidden from him? Or would the allurements of his earthly love be less strong because its dazzling incitements were no longer actually before his eyes? He had refused all aid and all alliance. He had chosen to try the issue alone and unbefriended. Was he strong enough?—strong enough to think on his love, and yet not to bow to it?—strong enough to picture to himself all its charms, only to refuse to gather them? Should he not have seized every aid

that counsel and authority could offer him? Would he not find too late that his true strategy had been to fly, and not to challenge, the encounter? He had fancied he could be himself the impartial judge in his own cause, however vast the bribe that lay ready to his hand. The issue of his sojourn alone could tell whether he had misjudged his strength.

While Stafford mused and strove the world moved on, and with it that small fraction of it whose movements most nearly bore on the fortunes of the recluse.

The party at Millstead Manor was finally broken up by the departure of the Territons and of Morewood about a week after Stafford left. The cricket-match came off with great *éclat;* in spite of a steady thirteen from the Rector, who spent two hours in "compiling" it—to use the technical term—and of several catches missed by Sir Roderick, who was tried in vain in all positions in the field, the Manor team won by five wickets, and Bob Territon felt that his summer had been well spent. Ayre lingered on with Eugene, shooting the coverts till mid September, when the latter abruptly and perhaps rudely announced that he could not stand it any longer, and straightway took himself off to the Continent, sending a line to Stafford to apprise him of the fact, and another to Kate, to say he would have no address for the next month.

For a moment Sir Roderick was at a loss. He was tired of shooting; he hated yachting; the ordinary country-house visit was nothing but shooting in the daytime and unmitigated boredom in the evening. Really he didn't know what to do with himself. This alarming state of mind might have issued in some incongruous activity of a useful

sort, had not he been rescued from it by the sudden discovery that he had a mission. This revelation dawned upon him in consequence of a note he received from Lord Rickmansworth. It appeared that that nobleman had very soon got tired of his moor, had resigned it into the eager hands of Bob Territon, and was now at Baden-Baden. This was certainly odd, and the writer evidently knew it would appear so; he therefore appended an explanation which was entirely satisfactory to Sir Roderick, but which is, happily, irrelevant to the purposes of this story. What is more to the purpose, it further appeared that Mrs. Welman, Kate Bernard's aunt, had discarded Buxton in favor of the same resort, and that Mr. Haddington, M. P., had also "proceeded" thither.

"They are at the Victoria," wrote Rickmansworth; "I am at the Badischerhof, and—[irrelevant matter]. I go about a good deal with them, but it's beastly slow. Haddington is all day in Kate's pocket, and Kate at best isn't amusing. But what's Lane up to? Do come out here, old fellow. I'll find you some amusement. Who do you think is here with—[more irrelevant matter]."

Sir Roderick was influenced in part, no doubt, by the irrelevant matter. But he also felt that what concerns us concerned him. He had come to a very definite conclusion that Kate Bernard ought not to marry Eugene Lane. He was also sure that unless something was done the marriage would take place. Kate did not care for Eugene, but the match was too good to be given up. Eugene would never face the turmoil necessary to break it off.

"I am the man," said Sir Roderick to himself.

"I couldn't catch the parson, but if I can't catch Miss Kate, call me an ass!"

And he took train to Baden, sending off a wire to Morewood to join him if he could, for a considerable friendship existed between them. Morewood, however, wouldn't come, and Ayre was forced to make the journey in solitude.

"I thought I should bring him!" exclaimed Lord Rickmansworth triumphantly, as he received his friend on the platform, and conducted him to a very perfect drag which stood at the door. "Oh, you old thief!"

Rickmansworth was a tall, broad, reddish-faced young man, with a jovial laugh, infinite capacity for being amused at things not intrinsically humourous, and manners that he had tried, fortunately with imperfect success, to model on those of a prize-fighter. Ayre liked him for what he was, while shuddering at what he tried to be.

"I didn't come on that account at all," he said. "I came to look after some business."

"Get out!" said the Earl pleasantly; "do you think I don't know you?"

Ayre allowed himself to yield in silence. His motives were a little mixed; and, anyhow, it was not at the moment desirable to explain them. His vindication would wait.

In the afternoon he paid his call on Mrs. Welman. She was delighted to see him, not only as a man of social repute, but also because the good lady was in no little distress of mind. The arrangement between Kate and Eugene was, as a family arrangement, above perfection. Mrs. Welman was not rich, and like people who are not rich, she highly esteemed riches; like most women, she

looked with favour on Eugene; the fact of Kate having some money seemed to her, as it does to most people, a reason for her marrying somebody who had more, instead of aiding in the beneficent work of a more equal distribution of wealth. But Kate was undeniably wilful. She treated her engagement, indeed, as an absolutely binding and unbreakable tie—a fact so conclusively accomplished that it could almost be ignored. But she received any suggestion of a possible excess in her graciousness toward Haddington and her acceptance of his society, as at once a folly and an insult; and as she was of age and paid half the bills, all means of suasion were conspicuously lacking. Mrs. Welman was in a position exactly the reverse of the pleasant one; she had responsibility without power. It is true her responsibility was mainly a figment of her own brain, but its burden upon her was none the less heavy for that.

It must be admitted that Ayre's dealings with her were wanting in candour. Under the guise of family friendship, he led her on to open her mind to him. He extracted from her detailed accounts of long excursions into the outskirts of the forest, of numberless walks in the shady paths, of an expedition to the races (where perfect solitude can always be obtained), and of many other diversions which Kate and Haddington had enjoyed together, while she was left to knit "clouds" and chew reflections in the Kurhaus garden. All this, Ayre recognised, with lively but suppressed satisfaction, was not as it should be.

"I have spoken to Kate," she concluded, "but she takes no notice; will you do me a service?"

"Of course," said Ayre; "anything I can."

"Will you speak to Mr. Haddington?"

This by no means suited Ayre's book. Moreover, it would very likely expose him to a snub, and he had no fancy for being snubbed by a man like Haddington.

"I can hardly do that. I have no position. I'm not her father, or uncle, or anything of that sort."

"You might influence him."

"No, he'd tell me to mind my own business. To speak plainly, my dear lady, it isn't as if Kate couldn't take care of herself. She could stop his attentions to-morrow if she liked. Isn't it so?"

Mrs. Welman sadly admitted it was.

"The only thing I can do is to keep an eye on them, and act as I think best; that I will gladly do."

And with this very ambiguous promise poor Mrs. Welman was forced to be content. Whatever his inward view of his own meaning was, Ayre certainly fulfilled to the letter his promise of keeping an eye on them. Kate was at first much annoyed at his appearance; she thought she saw in him an emissary of Eugene. Sir Roderick tactfully disabused her mind of this notion, and, without intruding himself, he managed to be with them a good deal, and with Haddington alone a good deal more. Moreover, even when absent, he could generally have given a shrewd guess where they were and what they were doing. Without altogether neglecting the other claims at which Rickmansworth had hinted, and which resolved themselves into a long-standing and entirely platonic attachment, he yet devoted himself with zest and assiduity to his self-imposed task.

In its prosecution he contrived to make use of

Rickmansworth to some extent. The young man was a hospitable soul, delighting in parties and picnics. Only consent to sit with him on his four-in-hand and let him drive you, and he cheerfully feasted you and all your friends. His acquaintance was large, and not, perhaps, very select. But Ayre insisted on the proper distinctions being observed, and was indebted to Rickmansworth's parties for many opportunities of observation. He was sure Haddington meant to marry Kate if he could; the scruples which had in some degree restrained his actions, though not his designs, at Millstead, had vanished, and he was pushing his suit, firmly and daringly ignoring the fact of the engagement. Kate did nothing to remind him of it that Ayre could see, but her behaviour, on the other hand, convinced him that Haddington was to her only a second string, and that, unless compelled, she would not let Eugene go. She took occasion more than once to show him that she regarded her relation to Eugene as fully existent. No doubt she thought there was a chance that such words might find their way to Eugene's ears. It is hardly necessary to say they did not.

Watch as he might, Ayre's chance was slow in coming. He knew very well that the fact of a young lady, deserted by him who ought to have been in attendance, consoling herself with a flirtation with somebody else, was not enough for him to go upon. He must have something more tangible than that. He did not, indeed, look for anything that would compel Eugene to act; he had no expectation and, to do him justice, no hope of that, for he knew Eugene would act on nothing but an extreme necessity. His hope lay in Kate

herself. On her he was prepared to have small mercy; against her he felt justified in playing the very rigour of the game. But for a long while he had no opportunity of beginning the rubber. A fortnight wore away, and nothing was done. Ayre determined to wait on events no longer; he would try his hand at shaping them.

"I wonder if Rick is too great a fool?" he said to himself meditatively one morning, as he crossed one of the little bridges, and took his way to the Kurhaus in search of his friend. "I must try him."

He found Lord Rickmansworth alone, but quite content. It was one of his happy characteristics that he existed with delight under almost any circumstances. One of his team was lame, and a great friend of his was sulky and had sent him away, and yet he sat radiantly cheerful, with a large cigar in his mouth and a small terrier by his side, subjecting every lady who passed to a respectful and covert but none the less searching and severe examination.

"I say, Rick, have you seen Haddington lately?"

"Yes; he's gone down the road with Kate Bernard to play tennis, or some such foolery."

"With Kate?"

"Rather! Didn't expect anything else, did you?"

"Does he mean to marry that girl?" asked Ayre, with a face of great innocence, much as if it had just occurred to him.

"Well, he can't, unless she chucks old Eugene over."

"Will she, do you think?"

"Well, I'm afraid not. I've got some money on that they're never married, but I don't see my way to handling it."

"Much?"

"Well, no; about twopence-halfpenny—a fancy bet."

"I'm glad it's nothing, because I want you to help me, and you couldn't have if you had anything on; besides, you shouldn't bet on such things."

"Oh, I'm not going to meddle with the thing. It's enough work to prevent one's self getting married, without troubling about other people. But I rather like you telling me not to bet on it!"

"She wouldn't suit Eugene."

"No; lead him the devil of a life."

"She don't care for him."

"Not a straw."

"Then, why don't she break it off?"

"Ah, you innocent!" said Rickmansworth, with a broad grin. "Never heard of such a thing as money in the case, did you? Where have you been these last five-and-forty years?"

"Your raillery's a little fatiguing, Rick, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Say anything you like, old chap, as long as it isn't swearing. That's *verbot* here—penalty one mark—see regulations. You must go outside if you want to curse, barring of course you're a millionaire and like to make a splash."

"Rick, Rick, you do not amuse me. I do not belong to the Albatross Club."

"No; over age," replied his companion blandly, and chuckled violently.

"I like to score off old Ayre, you know," he said, in reporting the episode afterward. "He thinks himself smart."

"But look here. I want you to do this: you go to Haddington and stir him up; tell him to bustle

along; tell him Kate is fooling him, and make him put it to her—yes or no."

"Why? it's not my funeral!"

"Is that your latest American? I wish you'd find native slang; we used in my day; but I'll tell you why. It's because she's keeping him on till she sees what Eugene'll do. She's treating Eugene shamefully."

"Oh, stow all that! Eugene is not so remarkably strict, you know." And Lord Rickmansworth winked.

"Well, we'll leave that out," said Ayre, smiling. "Tell him it's treating *him* shamefully."

"That's more the ticket. But what if she says 'No'?"

"If she says 'No' right out, I'm done," said Ayre. "But will she?"

"The devil only knows!" said Lord Rickmansworth.

"Do you think you won't bungle it?"

"Do you take me for an ass? I'll make him move, Ayre; he shall give her a chaste salute before the day's out. Old Eugene's no better than he should be, but I'll see him through."

Ayre thought privately that his companion had perhaps other motives than love for Eugene: perhaps family feelings, generally dormant, had asserted themselves; but he had the wisdom not to hint at this.

"If you can frighten him, he'll press it on."

"Do you think I might lie a bit?"

"No, I shouldn't lie. It's awkward. Besides, you know you wouldn't do it, and you couldn't if you tried."

"I'll stir him up," reiterated Rickmansworth.

"Give me my prayer-book and parasol, and I'll go and find him."

Ayre ignored what he supposed to be the joke buried in this saying, and saw his friend off on his errand, repeating his instructions as he went.

What Lord Rickmansworth said to Mr. Haddington has never, as the newspapers put it, transpired. But ever since that date Sir Roderick has always declared that Rick is not such a fool as he looks. Certainly the envoy was well pleased with himself when he rejoined his companion at dinner, and after imbibing a full glass of champagne, said:

"To-night, my worthy old friend, you will see."

"Did he bite?"

"He bit. That fellow's no fool. He saw Kate's game when I pointed it out."

"Will he stand up to her?"

"Rather! going to hold a pistol to her head."

"I wonder what she'll say?"

"That's your lookout. I've done my stage."

Ayre was nearer excitement than he had been for a long while. After dinner he could not rest. Refusing to accompany Rickmansworth to the entertainment the latter was bound for, he strolled out into the quiet walks outside the Kurhaus, which were deserted by visitors and peopled only by a few frugal natives, who saved their money and took the music of the band from a cheap distance. But surely some power was fighting for him, for before he had gone a hundred yards he saw on one of the seats in front of him two persons whom the light of the moon clearly displayed as Kate and Haddington. At Baden there is a little hillside—one path runs at the bottom, another runs along the side of the hill, half-way up. Ayre hastily diverted his

steps into the upper path. A minute's walk brought him directly behind the pair. Trees hid him from them; a seat invited him. For a moment he struggled. Then, *rubesco referens*, he sat down and deliberately listened. With the sophisms by which he sought to justify this action, we have no concern; perhaps he was not in reality much concerned about them. But what he heard had its importance.

"I have been more patient than most men," Haddington was saying.

"You have no right to speak in that way," Kate protested; "it's—it's not respectful."

"Kate, have we not got beyond respect?"

"I hope not," said Sir Roderick to himself.

"I mean," Haddington went on, "there is a point at which you must face realities. Kate, do you love me?"

Ayre leant forward and peered through the bushes.

"I will not break my engagement."

"That is no answer."

"I can't help it. I have been taught——"

"Oh, taught! Kate, you know Lane; you know what he is. You saw him with Lady——"

"You're very unkind."

"And for his sake you throw away what I offer?"

"Won't you be patient?"

"Ah, you admit——"

"No, I don't!"

"But you can't deny it. Now you make me happy."

The conversation here became so low in tone that Ayre, to his vast disgust, was unable to overhear it. The next words that reached his ear came again from Haddington.

"Well, I will wait—I will wait three months. If nothing happens then, you will break it off?"

A gentle "Yes" floated up to the eavesdropper.

"Though why you want him to break it off rather than yourself, I don't know."

"He doesn't appreciate her morality," reflected Ayre, with a chuckle.

"Kate, we are promised to one another? secretly, if you like, but promised?"

"I'm afraid it's very wrong."

"Why, he deliberately insulted you!"

The tones again became inaudible; but after a pause there came a sound that made Ayre almost jump.

"By Jove!" he whispered in his excitement. "Confound these trees! Was it only her hand, or——"

"Then I have your promise, dear?"

"Yes; in three months. But I must go in. Aunt will be angry."

"You won't let him win you over?"

"He has treated me badly; but I don't want it said I jilted him."

They had risen by now.

"You ask such a lot of me," said Haddington.

"Ah! I thought you said you loved me. Can't you wait three months?"

"I suppose I must. But, Kate, you are sincere with me? Tell me you love me."

Again Ayre leant forward. They had begun to walk away, but now Haddington stopped, and laying his hand on Kate's arm, detained her. "Say you love me," he said again.

"Yes, I love you!" said Kate, with commendable confusion, and they resumed their walk.

"What is her game?" Ayre asked himself. "If she means to throw Eugene over, why doesn't she do it right out? I don't believe she does. She's afraid he'll throw her over. And, by Jove! she fobbed that fool off again! We're no further forward than we were. If he makes trouble about this she'll deny the whole thing. Miss Bernard is a lady of talent. But—no, can I? Yes, I will. Rather than let her win, I'll step in. I'll go and see her to-morrow. We shall neither of us be in a position to reproach the other. But I'll see what I can do. But Haddington! To think she should get round him again!"

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF BADEN

Lord Rickmansworth was enjoying himself. Over and above the particular pleasures for whose sake he had come to Baden, he relished intensely the new attitude in which he found himself standing toward Ayre. Throughout their previous acquaintance it had been Rickmansworth who was eager and excited, Ayre who applied the cold water. Now the parts were reversed, and the younger man found great solace in jocosely rallying his senior on his unwonted zeal and activity. Ayre accepted his friend's jocosity and his own excitement with equal placidity. Reproaches had never stirred him to exertion; ridicule would not stop him now. He took leave to add himself to the materials for slightly contemptuous amusement that the world had hitherto afforded him, and he found his own absurd actions a very sensible addition to his resources. He realised why people who never act on impulse and never do uncalled-for things are not only dull to others, but suffer boredom themselves. However the Millstead love affairs affected the principal actors, there can be no question that they relieved Sir Roderick Ayre from *ennui* for a considerable number of months and exercised a very wholesome effect on a man who had come to take pride in his own miserable incapacity for honest emotion.

He rose the next morning as nearly with the

lark as could reasonably be expected; more nearly with the lark than the domestic staff of the Badischerhof at all approved of. Was not Kate Bernard in the habit of taking the waters at half-past seven? And in solitude! For Haddington's devotion was not allowed by him to interfere with that early ride which is so often a mark of legislators, and an assertion, I suppose, of the strain on their minds that might be ignored or doubted if not backed up by some such evidence. The strain, of course, followed Haddington to Baden; it was among his most precious appurtenances; and Ayre, relying upon it, had little doubt that he could succeed in finding Kate alone and unprotected.

He was not deceived. He found Kate just disposing of her draught, and an offer of his company for a stroll was accepted with tolerable graciousness. Kate distrusted him, but she thought there was use in keeping on outwardly good terms; and she had no suspicion of his shameless conduct the night before. Ayre directed their walk to the very same seat on which she and Haddington had sat. As they passed, either romance or laziness suggested to Kate that they should sit down. Ayre accepted her proposal without demur, asked and obtained leave for a cigarette, and sat for a few moments in apparent ease and vacancy of mind. He was thinking how to begin.

"Ought one ever to do evil that good may come?" he did begin, a long way off.

"Dear me, Sir Roderick, what a curious question! I suppose not."

"I'm sorry; because I did evil last night, and I want to confess."

"I really don't want to hear," said Kate, in some

alarm. There's no telling what men will say when they become confidential, and Kate's propriety was a tender plant.

"It concerns you."

"Me? Nonsense! How can it?"

"In order to serve a friend, I did a—well—a doubtful thing."

Kate was puzzled.

"You are in a curious mood, Sir Roderick. Do you often ask moral counsel?"

"I am not going to ask it. I am, with your kind permission, going to offer it."

"You are going to offer me moral counsel?"

"I thought of taking that liberty. You see, we are old friends."

"We have known one another some time."

Ayre smiled at the implied correction.

"Do you object to plain speaking?"

"That depends on the speaker. If he has a right, no; if not, yes."

"You mean I should have no right?"

"I certainly don't see on what ground."

"If not an old friend of yours, as I had hoped to be allowed to rank myself, I am, anyhow, a very old friend of Eugene's."

"What has Mr. Lane to do with it?"

"As an old friend of his——"

"Excuse me, Sir Roderick; you seem to forget that Mr. Lane is even more than an old friend to me."

"He should be, no doubt," said Ayre blandly.

"I shall not listen to this. No old friendship excuses impertinence, Sir Roderick."

"Pray don't be angry. I have really something to say, and—pardon me—you must hear it."

"And what if I refuse?"

"True; I did wrong to say 'must.' You are at perfect liberty. Only, if you refuse, Eugene must hear it."

Kate paused. Then, with a laugh, she said:

"Perhaps I am taking it too gravely. What is this great thing I must hear?"

"Ah! I hoped we could settle it amicably. It's merely this: you must release Eugene from his engagement."

Kate did not trouble to affect surprise. She knew it would be useless.

"Did he send you to tell me this?"

"You know he didn't."

"Then whose envoy are you? Ah! perhaps you are Claudia Territon's chosen knight?"

"Not at all," said Ayre, still unruffled. "I have had no communication with Lady Claudia—a fact of which you have no right to affect doubt."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean you must release Eugene."

"Pray tell me why," asked she calmly, but with a calm only obtained after effort.

"Because it is not usual—and in this matter it seems to me usage is right—it is not usual for a young lady to be engaged to two men at once."

"You are merely insolent. I will wish you good-morning."

"I am glad you understand my insinuation. Explanations are so tedious. Where are you going, Miss Bernard?"

"Home."

"Then I must tell Eugene."

"Tell him what you like." But she sat down again.

"You are engaged to Eugene?"

"Of course."

"You are also engaged to Spencer Haddington?"

"It's untrue; you know it's untrue. Are you an old woman, to think a girl can't speak to a man without being engaged to him?"

"I must congratulate you on your liberality of view, Miss Bernard. I had hardly given you credit for it. But you know it isn't untrue. You are under a promise to give Haddington your hand in three months: not, mark you, a conditional promise—an absolute promise."

"That is not a happy guess."

"It's not a guess at all. No doubt you mean it to be conditional. He understood, and you meant him to understand, it is an absolute promise."

"How dare you accuse me of such things?"

"Nothing short of absolute knowledge would so far embolden me."

"Absolute knowledge?"

"Yes, last night."

Kate's rage carried her away. She turned on him in fury.

"You listened!"

"Yes, I listened."

"Is that what a gentleman does?"

"As a rule, it is not."

"I despise you for a mean dastard! I have no more to say to you."

"Come, Miss Bernard, let us be reasonable. We are neither of us blameless."

"Do you think Eugene would listen to such a tale? And such a person?"

"He might and he might not. But Haddington would."

"What could you tell him?"

"I could tell him that you're making a fool of him—keeping him dangling on till you have arranged the other affair one way or the other. What would he say then?"

Kate knew that Haddington was already tried to the uttermost. She knew what he would say.

"You see I could—if you'll allow me the metaphor—blow you out of the water."

"You daren't confess how you got the knowledge."

"Oh, dear me, yes," said Ayre, smiling. "When you're opening a blind man's eyes he doesn't ask after your moral character. You must consider the situation on the hypothesis that I am shameless."

Kate was not strong enough to carry on the battle. She had fury, but not doggedness. She burst into tears.

"If I were doing all you say, whose fault was it?" she sobbed. "Didn't Eugene treat me shamefully?"

"If he flirted a little, it was in part your fault. If you had flirted a little with Haddington, I should have said nothing. But this—well, this is a little strong."

"I am a very unhappy girl," said Kate.

"It isn't as if you cared twopence for Eugene, you know."

"No, I hate him!" said Kate, unwisely yielding to anger again.

"I thought so. And you will do what I ask?"

"If I don't what will you do?"

"I shall write to Eugene. I shall see Haddington; and I shall see your aunt. I shall tell them

all that I know, and how I know it. Come, Miss Bernard, don't be foolish. You had better take Haddington."

"I know it's all a plot. You're all fighting in that little creature's interest."

"Meaning——?"

"Claudia Territon. But if I can help it, Eugene shall never marry her."

"That's another point."

"His friend Father Stafford will have to be considered there."

"Do not let us drift into that. Will you write?"

"To whom?"

"To Eugene."

Kate looked at him with a healthy hatred.

"And you will tell Haddington he needn't wait those three months?"

"I suppose you're proud of yourself now!" she broke out. "First eavesdropping, and then bullying a girl!"

"I'm not at all proud of myself, and I am, if you'd believe it, rather sorry for you."

"I shall take care to let your friends know my opinion of you."

"Certainly—with any details you think advisable. Have I your promise? Is it any use struggling any longer? This scene is so very unpleasant."

"Won't you give me a week?"

"Not a day!"

Kate drew herself up with a sort of dignity.

"I despise you and your schemes, and Eugene Lane, and Claudia Territon, and all your crew!" she allowed herself to say.

"But you promise?"

"Yes, I promise. There! Now, may I go?"

Ayre courteously took off his hat, and stood on one side, holding it in his hand and bowing slightly as she swept indignantly by him.

"I'll give her a day to tell Haddington, and three days to tell Eugene. Unless she does, I must go through it all again, and it's damnably fatiguing. She's not a bad sort—fought well when she was cornered. But I couldn't let Eugene do it—I really couldn't. Ugh! I'll go back to breakfast."

Kate was cowed. She told Haddington. Let us pass over that scene. She also wrote to Eugene, addressing the letter to Millstead Manor. Eugene was not at Millstead Manor; and if Ayre had hastily assumed that his *fiancée* would be in possession of his address, was it her business to undeceive him? She was by no means inclined to do one jot more than fulfil the letter of her bond—whereby it came to pass that Eugene did not receive the letter for nearly two months and did not know of his recovered liberty all that time. For Haddington, in his joy, easily promised silence for a little while; it seemed only decent; and even Ayre could not refuse to agree with him that, though Eugene must be told, nobody else ought to be until Eugene had formally signified his assent to the lady's transfer. Ayre could not take upon himself, on his friend's behalf, the responsibility of dispensing with this ceremony, though he was sure it would be a mere ceremony.

As for Ayre himself, when his task was done he straightway fled from Baden. He was a hardened sinner, but he could not face Mrs. Welman.

It was, however, plainly impossible to confine

the secret so strictly as to prevent it coming to the knowledge of Lord Rickmansworth. Indeed he had a right to know the issue, for he had been a sharer in the design; and accordingly, when he also left Baden and betook himself to his own house to spend what was left of the autumn, he carried locked in his heart the news of the fresh development. On the whole, he observed the injunction of silence urgently laid upon him by Ayre with tolerable faithfulness. But there are limits to these things, and it never entered Rickmansworth's head that his sister was included among the persons who were to remain in ignorance till the matter was finally settled. He met Claudia at the family reunion at Territon Park in the beginning of October, and when she and he and Bob were comfortably seated at dinner together, among the first remarks he made—indeed, he was brimming over with it—was:

"I suppose you've heard the news, Clau?"

What with one thing—packing and unpacking, travelling, perhaps less obvious troubles — Lady Claudia was in a state which, if it manifested itself in a less attractive person, might be called snappish.

"I never hear any news," she answered shortly.

"Well, here's some for you," replied the Earl, grinning. "Kate has chucked Eugene over."

"Nonsense!" But she started and coloured, all the same.

"I suppose you were at Baden and saw it all, and I wasn't!" said Rickmansworth, with ponderous satire. "So we won't say any more about it."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"No; never mind! It doesn't matter — all a

mistake. I'm always making some beastly blunder—eh, Bob?" and he winked gently at his appreciative brother.

"Yes, you're an ass, of course!" said Bob, entering into the family humour.

"Good thing I've got a sister to keep me straight!" pursued the Earl, who was greatly amused with himself. "Might have gone about believing it, you know."

Claudia was annoyed. Brothers are annoying at times.

"I don't see any fun in that," she said.

Lord Rickmansworth drank some beer (beer was the Territon drink), and maintained silence.

The butler came in with his satellite, swept away the beer and the other *impedimenta*, and put on dessert. The servants disappeared, but silence still reigned unbroken.

Claudia arose, and went round to her brother's chair. He was ostentatiously busy with a large plum.

"Rick, dear, won't you tell me?"

"Tell you! Why, it's all nonsense, you know."

"Rick, dear!" said Claudia again, with her arm round his neck.

He was going to carry on his jest a little further, when he happened to look at her.

"Why, Clau, you look as if you were almost——"

"Never mind that," she said quickly. "Oh! do tell me."

"It is quite true. She's written breaking it off, and has accepted Haddington. But it's a secret, you know, till they've heard from Eugene, at all events. Must hear in a day or two."

"Is it really true?"

"Of course it is."

Claudia kissed him, and suddenly ran out of the room.

The brothers looked at one another.

"I hope that's all right?" said the elder questioningly.

"I expect so," answered the younger. "But, you see, you don't quite know where to have Eugene."

"I shall know where to have him, if necessary."

"You'd better keep your hoof out of it, old man," said Bob candidly.

Pursuing his train of thought, Rickmansworth went on:

"Must have been rather a queer game at Millstead?"

"Yes. There was Eugene and Kate, and Claudia and the parson, and old Ayre sticking his long nose into it."

"Trust old Ayre for that; and is it a case?"

"Well, now Kate's out of it, I expect it is, only you don't know where to have Eugene. And there's the parson."

"Yes; Ayre told us a bit about him. But she doesn't care for him?"

"She didn't tell him so—not by any means," said Bob; "and I bet he's far gone on her."

"She can't take him."

"Good Lord! no."

Though how they proposed to prevent it did not appear.

"Think Lane'll write to her?"

"He ought to, right off."

"Queer girl, ain't she?"

"Deuced!"

"Old Ayre! I say, Bob, you should have seen the old sinner at Baden."

"What? with Kate?"

"No; the other business."

And they plunged into matters with which we need not concern ourselves, and proceeded to rend and destroy the character of that most respectable, middle-aged gentleman, Sir Roderick Ayre. The historian hastens to add that their remarks were, as a rule, entirely devoid of truth, with which general comment we may leave them.

CHAPTER X

MR. MOREWOOD IS MOVED TO INDIGNATION

When Morewood was at work he painted portraits, and painted them uncommonly well. Of course he made his moan at being compelled to spend all his time on this work. He was not, equally of course, in any way compelled, except in the sense that if you want to make a large income you must earn it. This is the sense in which many people are compelled to do work, which they give you to understand it is not the most suited to their genius, and it must be admitted that, although their words are foolish, not to say insincere, yet their deeds are sensible. There can be no mistake about the income, and there often is about the genius. Morewood, whose eccentricity stopped short of his banking account, painted his portraits like other people, and only deviated into landscape for a month in the summer, with the unfailing result of furnishing a crop of Morewoodesque parodies on Mother Nature that conclusively proved the fates were wiser than the painter.

This year it so chanced that he chose the wilds of Exmoor for the scene of his outrages. He settled down in a small inn and plied his brush busily. Of course he did not paint anything that the ordinary person cared to see, or in the way in which it would appear to such person. But he was greatly pleased with his work; and one day, as he threw himself down on a bank at noon and got out his

bread and cheese, he was so carried away, being by nature a conceited man, as to exclaim :

"My head of Stafford was the best head done these hundred years ; and that's the best bit of background done these hundred and fifty !"

The frame of the phrase seemed familiar to him as he uttered it, and he had just succeeded in tracing it back to the putative parentage of Lord Verulam, when, to his great astonishment, he heard Stafford's voice from the top of the bank, saying :

"As I am in your mind already, Mr. Morewood, I feel my bodily appearance less of an intrusion on your solitude."

"Why, how in the world did you come here ?"

The spot was within ten miles of the Retreat, and part of Stafford's treatment for himself consisted of long walks ; but he only replied :

"I am staying near here."

"For health, eh ?"

"Yes—for health."

"Well, I'm glad to see you. How are you ? You don't look very first-class."

Stafford came down the bank without replying, and sat down. He was, in spite of it being the country and very hot, dressed in his usual black, and looked paler and thinner than ever.

"Have some lunch ?"

Stafford smiled.

"There's only enough for one," he said.

"Nonsense, man !"

"No, really ; I never take it."

A pause ensued. Stafford seemed to be thinking, while Morewood was undoubtedly eating. Presently, however, the latter said :

"You left us rather suddenly at Millstead."

"Yes."

"Sent for?"

"You of all men know why I went, Mr. Morewood."

"If you don't mind my admitting it, I do. But most people are so thin-skinned."

"I am not thin-skinned—not in that way. Of course you know. You told me."

"That head?"

"Yes; you did me a service."

"Well, I think I did, and I'm glad to hear you say so."

"Why?"

"Shows you've come to your senses," said Morewood, rapidly recovering from his lapse into civility.

Stafford seemed willing, even anxious, to pursue the subject. The *regimen* at the Retreat was no doubt severe.

"What do you mean by coming to my senses?"

"Why, doing what any man does when he finds he's in love—barring a sound reason against it."

"And that is?"

"Try his luck. You needn't look at me. I've tried my luck before now, and it was damned bad luck. So here I am, a musty old curmudgeon; and there's Ayre, a snarling old cur!"

"I don't bore you about it?"

"No, I like jawing."

"Well then, I was going to say, of course you don't know how it struck me."

"Yes, I do, but I don't think any the better of it for that."

"You knew about my vow? I suppose you think that——?"

"Bosh? Yes, I do. I think all vows bosh; but without asking you to agree to that, though I think I did ask the Bishop of Bellminster to, I do say this one is utter bosh. Why, your own people say so, don't they?"

"My own people? The people I suppose you mean don't say so. I took a vow never to marry—there were even more stringent terms—but that's enough."

"Well?"

"A vow," continued Stafford, "that you won't marry till you want to is not the same as a vow never to marry."

"No. I think I could manage the first sort."

"The first sort," said Stafford, with a smile, "is nowadays a popular compromise."

"I detest compromises. That's why I liked you."

"You're advising me to make one now."

"No, I advise you to throw up the whole thing."

"That's because you don't believe in anything?"

"Yes, probably."

"Suppose you believed all I believe and had done all I had?"

"How do you mean?"

"You believed what a priest believes—in heaven and hell—the gaining God and the losing him—in good and evil. Supposing you, believing this, had given your life to God, and made your vow to him—had so proclaimed before men, had so lived and worked and striven! Supposing you thought a broken vow was death to your own soul and a trap to the souls of others—a baseness, a treason, a desertion—more cowardly than a soldier's flight—as

base as a thief's purloining—meaning to you and those who had trusted you the death of good and the triumph of evil?"

He sat still, but his voice was raised in rapid and intense utterance; he gazed before him with starting eyes.

"All that," he went on, "it meant to me—all that and more—the triumph of the beast in me—passion and desire rampant—man forsaken and God betrayed—my peace forever gone, my honour forever stained. Can't you see? Can't you see?"

Morewood rose and paced up and down.

"Now—now can you judge? You say you knew—did you know that?"

"Do you still believe all that?"

"Yes, all, and more than all. For a moment—a day—perhaps a week, I drove myself to doubt. I tried to doubt. I rejoiced in it. But I cannot. As God is above us, I believe all that."

"If you break this vow you think you will be——?"

"The creature I have said? Yes—and worse."

"I think the vow utter nonsense," said Morewood again.

"But if you thought as I think, then would your love—yes, and would a girl's heart, weigh with you?"

Morewood stood still.

"I can hardly realise it," he said, "in a man of your brain. But——"

"Yes?" said Stafford, looking at him almost as if he were amused, for his sudden outburst had left him quite calm.

"If I believed that, I'd cut off my hand rather than break the vow."

"I knew it!" cried Stafford, "I knew it!"

Morewood was touched with pity.

"If you're right," he said, "it won't be so hard to you. You'll get over it."

"Get over it?"

"Yes; what you believe will help you. You've no choice, you know."

Stafford still wore a look of half-amusement.

"You have never felt belief?" he asked.

"Not for many years. That's all gone."

"You think you have been in love?"

"Of course I have—half a dozen times."

"No more than the other," said Stafford decisively.

Morewood was about to speak, but Stafford went on quickly:

"I have told you what belief is—I could tell you what love is; you know no more the one than the other. But why should I? I doubt if you would understand. You think you couldn't be shocked. I should shock you. Let it be. I think I could charm you, too. Let that be."

A pause followed. Stafford still sat motionless, but his face gradually changed from its stern aspect to the look that Morewood had once caught on his canvas.

"You're in love with her still?" he exclaimed.

"Still?"

"Yes. Haven't you conquered it? I'm a poor hand at preaching, but, by Jove! if I thought like you, I'd never think of the girl again."

"I mean to marry her," said Stafford quietly. "I have chosen."

Morewood was in very truth shocked. But Stafford's morals, after all, were not his care.

"Perhaps she won't have you," he suggested at last, as though it were a happy solution.

Stafford laughed outright.

"Then I could go back to my priesthood, I suppose?"

"Well—after a time."

"As a burglar who is caught before his robbery goes back to his trade. As if it made the smallest difference—as if the result mattered!"

"I suppose you are right there."

"Of course. But she will have me."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't doubt it. If I doubted it, I should die."

"I doubt it."

"Pardon me; I dare say you do."

"You don't want to talk about that?"

"It isn't worth while. I no more doubt it than that the sun shines. Well, Mr. Morewood, I am obliged to you for hearing me out. I had a curiosity to see how my resolution struck you."

"If you have told me the truth, it strikes me as devilish. I'm no saint; but if a man believes in good, as you do, by God, he oughtn't to trample it underfoot!"

Stafford took no notice of him. He rose and held out his hand. "I'm going back to London to-morrow," he said, "to wait till she comes."

"God help you!" said Morewood, with a sudden impulse.

"I have no more to do with God," said Stafford.

"Then the devil help you, if you rely on him!"

"Don't be angry," he said, with a swift return of his old sweet smile. "In old days I should

have liked your indignation. I still like you for it. But I have made my choice."

"'Evil, be thou my good.' Is that it?"

"Yes, if you like. Why talk about it any more? It is done."

He turned and walked away, leaving Morewood alone to finish his forgotten lunch.

He could not get the thought of the man out of his mind all day. It was with him as he worked, and with him when he sat after dinner in the parlour of his little inn, with his pipe and whiskey and water. He was so full of Stafford that he could not resist the impulse to tell somebody else, and at last he took a sheet of paper.

"I don't know if he's in town," he said, "but I'll chance it;" and he began:

DEAR AYRE:

By chance down here I met the parson. He is mad. He painted for me the passion of belief—which he said I hadn't and implied I couldn't feel. He threatened to paint the passion of love, with the same assertion and the same implication. He is convinced that if he breaks his vow (you remember it, of course) he'll be worse than Satan. Yet his face is set to break it. You probably can't help it, and wouldn't if you could, for you haven't heard him. He's going to London. Stop him if you can before he gets to Claudia Territon. I tell you his state of mind is hideous.

Yours,

A. MOREWOOD.

This somewhat incoherent letter reached Sir Roderick Ayre as he passed through London, and tarried a day or two in early October. He opened it, read it, and put it down on the breakfast-table. Then he read it again, and ejaculated:

"Talk about madness! Why, because Staf-

ford's mad—if he is mad—must our friend the painter go mad too? Not that I see he is mad. He's only been stirring up old Morewood's dormant piety."

He lit his cigar, and sat pondering the letter.

"Shall I try to stop him? If Claudia and Eugene have fixed up things it would be charitable to prevent him making a fool of himself. Why the deuce haven't I heard anything from that young rascal? Hullo! who's that?"

He heard a voice outside, and the next moment Eugene himself rushed in.

"Here you are!" he said. "Thought I should find you. You can't keep away from this dirty old town."

"Where do you spring from?" asked Ayre.

"Liverpool. I found the Continent slow, so I went to America. Nothing moving there, so I came back here. Can you give me breakfast?"

Ayre rang the bell, and ordered a new breakfast; as he did so he took up Morewood's letter and put it in his pocket.

Eugene went on talking with gay affectation about his American experiences. Only when he was through his breakfast did he approach home topics.

"Well, how's everybody?"

Ayre waited for a more definite question.

"Seen the Territons lately?"

"Not very. Haven't you?"

"No. They weren't over there, you know. Are they alive?"

"My young friend, are you trying to deceive me? You have heard from at least one of them, if you haven't seen them."

"I haven't—not a line. We don't correspond: not *comme il faut.*"

"Oh, you haven't written to Claudia?"

"Of course not."

"Why not?"

"Why should I?"

"Let us go back to the previous question. Have you heard from Miss Bernard?"

"Why probe my wounds? Not a single line."

"Confound her impudence! she never wrote!"

"I don't know why she should. But in case see ought, I'm bound to say she couldn't."

"Why not? She said she would; she said so to me."

"She couldn't have said so. You must have misunderstood her. I left no address, you know; and I had no difficulty in eluding interviewers—not being a prize-fighter or a minor poet."

Sir Roderick smiled.

"Gad! I never thought of that. She held me, after all."

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's a narrative; but I see I'm in for it. Sit still and hold your tongue till I'm through with it."

Eugene obeyed implicitly; and Ayre, not without honest pride, recounted his Baden triumph.

"And unless she's bolder than I think, you'll find a letter to that effect."

Eugene sat very quiet.

"Well, you don't seem overpleased, after all. Wasn't I right?"

"Quite right, old fellow. But, I say, is she in love with Haddington?"

"Ah, there's your beastly vanity? I think she

is rather, you know, or she'd never have given herself away so."

"Rum taste!" said Eugene, whose relief at his freedom was tempered by annoyance at Kate's insensibility. "But I'm awfully obliged. And, by Jove, Ayre, it's new life to me!"

"I thought so."

Eugene had got over his annoyance. A sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"I say, does Claudia know?"

"Rickmansworth's sure to have told her on the spot. She must have known it a month; and what's more, she must think you've known it a month."

"Inference that the sooner I show up the better."

"Exactly. What, are you off now? Do you know where she is?"

"I shall send a wire to Territon Park. Rick's sure to be there if she isn't, and I'll go down and find out about it."

"Wait a minute, will you? Have you heard from your friend Stafford lately?"

A shadow fell on Eugene's face.

"No. But that's over. Must be, or he'd never have bolted from Millstead."

Ayre was silent a moment. Morewood's letter told him that Stafford had set out to go to Claudia. What if he and Eugene met? Ayre had not much faith in the power of friendship under such circumstances.

"I think, on the whole, that I'd better show you a letter I've had," he said. "Mind you, I take no responsibility for what you do."

"Nobody wants you to," said Eugene, with a smile. "We all understand that's your position."

Ayre flung the letter over to him and he read it.

"Oh, by Jove, this is the devil!" he exclaimed, jumping off the writing-table, where he had seated himself.

"So Morewood seems to think."

"Poor old fellow! I say, what shall I do? Poor old Stafford! Fancy his cutting up like this."

"It's kind of you to pity him."

"What do you mean? I say, Ayre, you don't think there is anything in it?"

"Anything in it?"

"You don't think there's any chance that Claudia likes him?"

"Haven't an idea one way or the other," said Ayre rather disingenuously.

Eugene looked very perturbed.

"You see," continued Ayre, "it's pretty cool of you to assume the girl is in love with you when she knew you were engaged to somebody else up to a month ago."

"Oh, damn it, yes!" groaned Eugene; "but she knew old Stafford had sworn not to marry anybody."

"And she knew—of course she knew—you both wanted to marry her. I wonder what she thought of both of you!"

"She never had any idea of the sort about him. About me she may have had an inkling."

"Just an inkling, perhaps," assented Sir Roderick.

"The worst of it is, you know, if she does like me, I shall feel a brute, cutting in now. Old Stafford knew I was engaged too, you know."

"It all serves you right," observed Ayre com-

fortingly. "If you must get engaged at all, why the deuce couldn't you pick the right girl?"

"Fact is, I don't show up over well."

"You don't; that is a fact."

"Ayre, I think I ought to let him have his shot first."

"Bosh! why, as like as not she'd take him! If it struck her that he was chucking away his immortal soul and all that for her sake, as like as not she'd take him. Depend upon it, Eugene, once she caught the idea of romantic sin, she'd be gone —no girl could stand up against it."

"It is rather the sort of thing to catch Claudia's fancy."

"You cut in, my boy," continued Ayre. "Friendship's all very well——"

"Yes, 'save in the office and affairs of love'!" quoted Eugene, with a smile of scorn at himself.

"Well, you'd better make up your mind, and don't mount stilts."

"I'll go down and look round. But I can't ask her without telling her or letting him tell her."

"Pooh! she knows."

"She doesn't, I tell you."

"Then she ought to. You're a nice fellow! I slave and eavesdrop for you, and now you won't do the rest yourself. What the deuce do you all see in that parson? If I were your age, and thought Claudia Territon would have me, it would take a lot of parsons to put me on one side."

"Poor old Charlie!" said Eugene again. "Ayre, he shall have his shot."

"Meanwhile, the girl's wondering if you mean to throw her over. She's expected to hear from you

this last month. I tell you what: I expect Rick'll kick you when you do turn up."

"Well, I shall go down and try to see her: when I get there I must be guided by circumstances."

"Very good. I expect the circumstances will turn out to be such that you'll make love to Claudia and forget all about Stafford. If you don't——"

"What?"

"You're an infernally cold-blooded conscientious young ruffian, and I never took you for that before!"

And Ayre, more perturbed about other people's affairs than a man of his creed had any business to be, returned to the *Times* as Eugene went to pursue his errand.

CHAPTER XI

WAITING LADY CLAUDIA'S PLEASURE

STAFFORD had probably painted his state of mind in colours somewhat more startling than the reality warranted. When a man is going to act against his conscience, there is a sort of comfort in making out that the crime has features of more striking depravity than an unbiassed observer would detect; the inclination in this direction is increased when it is a question of impressing others. Sin seems commonplace if we give it no pomp and circumstance. No man was more free than Stafford from any conscious hypocrisy or posing, or from the inverted pride in immorality that is often an affectation, but also, more often than we are willing to allow, a real disease of the mind. But in his interview with Morewood he had yielded to the temptation of giving a more dramatic setting and stronger contrasts to his conviction and his action than the actual inmost movement of his mind justified. It was true that he was determined to set action and conviction in sharp antagonism, and to follow an overpowering passion rather than a belief that he depicted as no less dominant. Had his fierce words to Morewood reproduced exactly what he felt, it may be doubted whether the resultant of two forces so opposite and so equal could have been the ultimately unwavering intention that now possessed him. In truth, the aggressive strength of his belief had been sapped from within. His efforts after

doubt, described by himself as entirely unsuccessful, had not in reality been without result. They had not issued in any radical or wholesale alteration of his views. He was right in supposing that he would still have given as full intellectual assent to all the dogmas of his creed as formerly; the balance of probability was still in his view overwhelmingly in their favour. But it had come to be a balance of probability—not, of course, in the way in which a man balances one account of an ordinary transaction against another, and decides out of his own experience of how things happen—Stafford had not lost his mental discrimination so completely—but in the sense that he had appealed to reason, and thus admitted the jurisdiction of reason in matters which he had formerly proclaimed as outside the province of that sort of reasoning that governs other intellectual questions. In the result, he was left under the influence of a persuasion, not under the dominion of a command; and the former failed to withstand an assault that the latter might well have enabled him to repulse. He found himself able to forget what he believed, though not to disbelieve it; his convictions could be postponed, though not expelled; and in representing his mind as the present battle-ground of equal and opposite forces, he had rather expressed what a preacher would reveal as the inner truth of his struggle than what he was himself conscious of as going on within him. It is likely enough that his previous experience had made him describe his own condition rather in the rhetoric of the pulpit than in the duller language of a psychological narrative. He had certainly given Morewood one false impression, or rather, perhaps, Morewood had drawn one false though

natural inference for himself. He thought of Stafford, and his letter passed on the same view to Eugene, as of a man suffering tortures that passed enduring. Perhaps at the moment of their interview such was the case: the dramatic picture Stafford had drawn had for the moment terrified afresh the man who drew it. His normal state of mind, however, at this time was not unhappy. He was wretched now and then by effort; he was tortured by the sense of sin when he remembered to be. But for the most part he was too completely conquered by his passion to do other than rejoice in it. Possessed wholly by it, and full of an undoubting confidence that Claudia returned his love, or needed only to realise it fully to return it fully, he had silenced all opposition, and went forth to his wooing with an exultation and a triumph that no transitory self-judgments could greatly diminish. Life lay before him, long and full and rich and sweet. Let trouble be what it would, and right be what it might, life and love were in his own hands. The picture of a man giving up all he thought worth having, driven in misery by a force he could not resist to seek a remedy that he despaired of gaining—a remedy which, even if gained, would bring him nothing but fresh pain—this picture, over which Eugene was mourning in honest and perplexed friendship, never took form as a true presentment of himself to the man it was supposed to embody. If Eugene had known this, he would probably have felt less sympathy and more rivalry, and would have assented to Ayre's view of the situation rather than doubtingly maintained his own. A man may sometimes change himself more easily than he can persuade his friends to recognise the change.

Stafford left the Retreat the morning after his meeting with Morewood, feeling, he confessed to himself, as if he had taken a somewhat unfair advantage of its hospitality. The result of his sojourn there, if known to the Founder, might have been a trial of that enthusiast's consistency to his principles, and Stafford was glad to be allowed to depart, as he had come, unquestioned. He came straight to London, and turned at once to the task of finding Claudia as soon as he could. The most likely quarter for information was, he thought, Eugene Lane or his mother; and on the afternoon of his arrival in town—on the same day, that is, as Eugene had surprised Sir Roderick at breakfast—he knocked at the door of Eugene's house in Upper Berkeley Street, and inquired if Eugene were at home. The man told him that Mr. Lane had returned only that morning, from America, he believed, and had left the house an hour ago, on his way to Territon Park; he added that he believed Mr. Lane had received a telegram from Lord Rickmansworth inviting him to go down. Mrs. Lane was at Millstead Manor.

Stafford was annoyed at missing Eugene, but not surprised or disturbed to hear of his visit to Territon Park. Eugene did not strike him as a possible rival. It may be doubted whether in his present frame of mind he would have looked on any man's rivalry as dangerous, but of course he was entirely ignorant of the new development of affairs, and supposed Eugene to be still the affianced husband of Miss Bernard. The only way the news affected him was by dispelling the slight hope he had entertained of finding that Claudia had already returned to London.

He went back to his hotel, wrote a single line to Eugene, asking him to tell him Claudia's address, if he knew it, and then went for a walk in the Park to pass the restless hours away. It was a dull evening, and the earliest of the fogs had settled on the devoted city. A small drizzle of rain and the thickening blackness had cleared the place of saunterers, and Stafford, who prolonged his walk, apparently unconscious of his surroundings, had the dreary path by the Serpentine nearly to himself. As the fog grew denser and night fell, the spot became a desert, and its chill gloom began to be burdensome even to his prepossessed mind. He stopped and gazed as far as the mist let him over the water, which lay smooth and motionless, like a sheet of opaque glass; the opposite bank was shrouded from his view, and imagination allowed him to think himself standing on the shore of some almost boundless lake. Seen under such conditions, the Serpentine put off the cheerful vulgarity of its everyday aspect, and exercised over the spirit of the watcher the same fascination as a mountain tarn or some deep, quick-flowing stream. "Come hither and be at rest," it seemed to whisper, and Stafford, responsive to the subtle invitation, for a moment felt as if to die in the thought of his mistress would be as sweet as to live in her presence, and, it might be, less perilous. At least he could be quiet there. His mind travelled back to a bygone incident of his parochial life, when he had found a wretched shop-boy crouching by the water's edge, and trying to screw his courage up for the final plunge. It was a sordid little tragedy —an honest lad was caught in the toils of some slatternly Jezebel; she had made him steal for her,

had spent his spoil, and then deserted him for his "pal"—his own familiar friend. Adrift on the world, beggared in character and fortune, and sore to the heart, he had wandered to the edge of the water, and listened to its low-voiced promises of peace. Stafford had stretched forth his hand to pluck him from his doom and set him on his feet; he prevailed on the lad to go home in his company, and the course of a few days proved once again that despair may be no more enduring than delight. The incident had almost faded from his memory, but it revived now as he stood and looked on the water, and he recognised with a start the depths to which he was in danger of falling. The invitation of the water could not draw him to it till he knew Claudia's will. But if she failed him, was not that the only thing left? His desire had swallowed up his life, and seemed to point to death as the only alternative to its own satisfaction. He contemplated this conclusion, not with the personal interest of a man who thought he might be called to act upon it,—Claudia would rescue him from that,—but with a theoretical certainty that if by any chance the staff on which he leant should break, he would be in no other mind than that from which he had rescued his miserable shop-boy. Death for love's sake was held up in poetry and romance as a thing in some sort noble and honourable; as a man might die because he could not save his country, so might he because he could not please his lady-love. In old days, Stafford, rigidly repressing his æsthetic delight in such literature, had condemned its teaching with half-angry contempt, and enough of his former estimate of things remained to him to prevent him regarding such a

state of mind as it pictured as a romantic elevation rather than a hopeless degradation of a man's being. But although he still condemned, now he understood, if not the defence of such an attitude, at least the existence of it. He might still think it a folly ; it no longer appeared a figment. A sin it was, no doubt, and a degradation, but not an enormity or an absurdity ; and when he tried again to fancy his life without Claudia, he struggled in vain against the growing conviction that the pictures he had condemned as caricatures of humanity had truth in them, and that it might be his part to prove it.

With a shiver he turned away. Such imaginings were not good for a man, nor the place that bred them. He took the shortest cut that led out of the Park and back to the streets, where he found lights and people, and his thoughts, sensitive to the atmosphere round him, took a brighter hue. Why should he trouble himself with what he would do if he were deceived in Claudia ? He knew her too well to doubt her. He had pushed aside all obstacles to seek her, and she would fly to meet him ; and he smiled at himself for conjuring up fantasies of impossible misfortune, only to enjoy the solace of laying them again with the sweet confidence of love. He passed the evening in the contemplation of his happiness, awaiting Eugene's reply to his note with impatience, but without disquiet.

This same letter was, however, the cause of very serious disquiet to the recipient, more especially as it came upon the top of another troublesome occurrence. Rickmansworth had welcomed Eugene to Territon Park with his usual good-nature and his usual absence of effusion. In fact, he tele-

graphed that Eugene could come if he liked, but he, Rickmansworth, thought he'd find it beastly slow. Eugene went, but found, to his dismay, that Claudia was not there. Some mystery hung over her non-appearance; but he learned from Bob that her departure had been quite impromptu,—decided upon, in fact, after his telegram was received,—and that she was staying some five miles off, at the Dower House, with her aunt, Lady Julia, who occupied that residence.

Eugene was much annoyed and rather uneasy.

"It looks as if she didn't want to see me," he said to Bob.

"It does, almost," replied Bob cheerfully. "Perhaps she don't."

"Well, I'll go over and call to-morrow."

"You can if you like. *I* should let her alone."

Very likely Bob's words were the words of wisdom, but when did a lover—even a tolerably cool-headed lover like Eugene—ever listen to the words of wisdom? He went to bed in a bad temper. Then in the morning came Stafford's letter, and of course Eugene had no kind of doubt as to the meaning of it. Now, it had been all very well to be magnanimous and propose to give his friend a chance when he thought the pear was only waiting to drop into his hand; magnanimity appeared at once safe and desirable, and there was no strong motive to counteract Eugene's love for Stafford. Matters were rather different when it appeared that the pear was not waiting to drop—when, on the contrary, the pear had pointedly removed itself from the hand of the plucker, and seemed, if one may vary the metaphor, to have turned into a prickly pear. Eugene still believed that Claudia

loved him; but he saw that she was stung by his apparent neglect, and perhaps still more by the idea that in his view he had only to ask at any time in order to have. When ladies gather that impression, they think it due to their self-respect to make themselves very unpleasant, and Eugene did not feel sure how far this feeling might not carry Claudia's quick, fiery nature, more especially if she were offered a chance of punishing Eugene by accepting a suitor who was in many ways an object of her admiration and regard, and came to her with an indubitable halo of romance about him. Eugene felt that his consideration for Stafford might, perhaps, turn out to be more than a graceful tribute to friendship; it might mean a real sacrifice, a sacrifice of immense gravity; and he did what most people would do—he reconsidered the situation.

The matter was not, to his thinking, complicated by anything approaching to an implied pledge on his part. Of course Stafford had not looked upon him as a possible rival; his engagement to Kate Bernard had seemed to put him *hors de combat*. But he had been equally entitled to regard Stafford as out of the running; for surely Stafford's vow was as binding as his promise. They stood on an equality: neither could reproach the other—that is to say, each had matter of reproach against the other, but his mouth was closed. There was then only friendship—only the old bond that nothing was to come between them. Did this bond carry with it the obligation of standing on one side in such a case as this? Moreover, time was precious. If he failed to seek out Claudia that very day, she, knowing he was at Territon Park, would be justly aggrieved by a new proof of indifference or disre-

spect. And yet, if he were to wait for Stafford, that day must go by without his visit. Eugene had hitherto lived pleasantly by means of never asking too much of himself, and in consequence being always tolerably equal to his own demands upon himself. Quixotism was not to be expected of him. A nice observance of honour was as much as he would be likely to attain to; and friendship would be satisfied if he gave the doubtful points against himself.

He sat down after breakfast, and wrote a long letter to Stafford.

After touching very lightly on Stafford's position, and disclaiming not only any right to judge, but also any inclination to blame, he went on to tell in some detail the change that had occurred in his own situation, avowed his intention of gaining Claudia's hand if he could, clearly implied his knowledge that Stafford's heart was set on the same object, and ended with a warm declaration that the rivalry between them did not and should not alter his love, and that, if unsuccessful, he could desire to be beaten by no other man than Stafford. He added more words of friendship, told Stafford that he should try his luck as soon as might be, and that he had Rickmansworth's authority to tell him that, if he saw proper to come down for the same purpose, his coming would not be regarded as an intrusion by the master of the house.

Then he went and obtained the authority he had pledged, and sent his servant up to London with the letter, with instructions to deliver it instantly into Stafford's own hand. His distrust in the integrity of the postmaster's daughter in such a matter prevented his sending any further message by

the wires than one requesting Stafford to be at home to receive his letter between twelve and one, when his messenger might be expected to arrive.

With a conscience clear enough for all practical purposes, he then mounted his horse, rode over to the Dower House, and sent in his card to Lady Julia Territon. Lady Julia was probably well posted up; at any rate, she received him with kindness and without surprise, and, after the proper amount of conversation, told him she believed he would find Claudia in the morning-room. Would he stay to lunch? and would he excuse her if she returned to her occupations? Eugene prevaricated about the lunch, for the invitation was obviously, though tacitly, a contingent one, and conceded the lady's excuses with as respectable a show of sincerity as was to be expected. Then he turned his steps to the morning-room, declining announcement, and knocked at the door.

"Oh, come in," said Claudia, in a tone that clearly implied, "if you won't let me alone and stay outside."

"Perhaps she doesn't know who it is," thought Eugene, trying to comfort himself as he opened the door.

CHAPTER XII

LADY CLAUDIA IS VEXED WITH MANKIND

Of course she knew who it was, and her uninviting tone was a result of her knowledge. We are yet awaiting a systematic treatise on the psychology of women; perhaps they will some day be trained highly enough to analyse themselves. Until this happens, we must wait; for no man unites the experience and the temperament necessary. This could be proved, if proof were required; but, happily, proof of assertions is not always required, and proof of this one would lead us into a long digression, bristling with disputable matter, and requiring perhaps hardly less rare qualities than the task of writing the treatise itself. The modest scribe is reduced to telling how Claudia behaved, without pretending to tell why she behaved so, far less attempting to group her under a general law. He is comforted in thus taking a lower place by the thought that after all nobody likes being grouped under general laws—it is more interesting to be peculiar—and that Claudia would have regarded such an attempt with keen indignation; and by the further thought that if you once start on general laws, there's no telling where you will stop. The moment you get yours nicely formulated, your neighbour comes along with a wider one, and reduces it to a subordinate proposition, or even to the humiliating status of a mere example. Now even philosophers lose their temper when this oc-

curs, while ordinary mortals resort to abuse. These dangers and temptations may be conscientiously, and shall be scrupulously, avoided.

Eugene advanced into the room with all the assurance he could muster ; he could muster a good deal, but he felt he needed it every bit, for Claudia's aspect was not conciliatory. She greeted him with civility, and in reply to his remark that being in the neighbourhood he thought he might as well call, expressed her gratification and hinted her surprise at his remembering to do so. She then sat down, and for ten minutes by the clock talked fluently and resolutely about an extraordinary variety of totally uninteresting things. Eugene used this breathing-space to recover himself. He said nothing, or next to nothing, but waited patiently for Claudia to run down. She struggled desperately against exhaustion ; but at last she could not avoid a pause. Eugene's generalship had foreseen that this opening was inevitable. Like Fabius he waited, and like Fabius he struck.

" I have been so completely out of the world—out of my own world—for the last month that I know nothing. Didn't even have my letters sent on."

" Fancy ! " said Lady Claudia.

" I wish I had now."

Claudia was meant to say " Why ? " She didn't, so he had to make the connection for himself.

" I found one letter waiting for me that was most important."

" Yes ? " said Claudia, with polite but obviously fatigued interest.

" It was from Miss Bernard."

" Fancy not having her letters sent on ! "

"You know what was in that letter, Lady Claudia?"

"Oh, yes; Rickmansworth told me. I don't know if he ought to have. I am so very sorry, Mr. Lane."

"From not getting the letter, I didn't know for a month that I was free. I needn't shrink from calling it freedom."

"As you were in America, it couldn't make much difference whether you knew or not."

"I want you to know that I didn't know."

"Really you are very kind."

"I was afraid you would think——"

"Pray, what?" asked Claudia, in suspiciously calm tones.

Eugene was conscious he was not putting it in the happiest possible way; however, there was nothing for it but to go on now.

"Why, that—why, Claudia, that I shouldn't rush to you the moment I was free."

Claudia was sitting on a sofa, and as he said this Eugene came up and leant his hands on the back of it. He thought he had done it rather well at last. To his astonishment, she leapt up.

"This is too much!" she cried.

"Why, what?" exclaimed poor Eugene.

"To come and tell me to my face that you're afraid I've been crying for you for a month past!"

"Of course I don't mean——"

"Do I look very ill and worn?" demanded Claudia, with elaborate sarcasm. "Have I faded away? Make your mind easy, Mr. Lane. You will not have another girl's death at your door."

Eugene so far forgot himself as to stare at the ceiling and exclaim, "Good God!"

This appeared to add new fuel to the flame.

"You come and tell a girl—all but in words tell her—she was dying for love of you when you were engaged to another girl; dying to hear from you; dying to have you propose to her! And when she's mildly indignant you use some profane expression, just as if you had stated the most ordinary facts in the world! I am infinitely obliged for your compassion, Mr. Lane."

"I meant nothing of the sort. I only meant that considering what had passed between us——"

"Passed between us?"

"Well, yes, at Millstead, you know."

"Are you going to tell me I said anything then, when I knew you were engaged to Kate? I suppose you will stop short of that?"

Eugene wisely abandoned this line of argument. After all, most of the talking had been on his side.

"Why will you quarrel, Claudia? I came here in as humble a frame of mind as ever man came in."

"Your humility, Mr. Lane, is a peculiar quality."

"Won't you listen to me?"

"Have I refused to listen? But no, I don't want to listen now. You have made me too angry."

"Oh, but do listen just a little——"

Claudia suddenly changed her tone—indeed, her whole demeanour.

"Not to-day," she said beseechingly; "really, not to-day. I won't tell you why; but not to-day."

"No time like the present," suggested Eugene.

"Do you know there is something you don't allow for in women?"

"So it seems. What is that?"

"Just a little pride. No, I will not listen to

you!" she added, with an imperious little stamp of her foot, and a relapse into hostility.

"May I come again?"

"I don't know."

Eugene was not a patient man. He allowed himself a shrug of the shoulders.

"Are you about to congratulate me on having 'bagged' another?"

"You're entirely hopeless to-day, and entirely charming!" he said. "If any girl but you had treated me like this, I'd never come near her again."

Claudia looked daggers.

"Pray don't make me an exception to your usual rule."

"As it is, I shall go away now and come back presently. You may then at least listen to me. That's all I've asked you to do so far."

"I am bound to do that. I will some day. But do go now."

"I will directly; but I want to speak to you about something else."

"Anything else in the world! And on any other subject I will be—charming—to you. Sit down. What is it?"

"It's about Stafford."

"Your friend Father Stafford? What about him?"

"He's coming down here."

"Oh, how nice! It will be a pleasant ref—resource."

Eugene smiled.

"Don't mind saying what you mean—or even what you don't mean; that generally gives people greater pleasure."

"You're making me angry again."

"But what do you think he's coming for?"

"To see you, I suppose."

"On the contrary. To see you."

"Pray don't be absurd."

"It's gospel truth, and very serious. He is in love with you. No—wait, please. You must forgive my speaking of it. But you ought to know."

"Father Stafford?"

"No other."

"But he—he's not going to marry anybody. He's taken a vow."

"Yes. He's going to break it—if you'll help him."

"You wouldn't make fun of this. Is it true?"

"Yes, it's desperately true. Now, I'm not going to tell you any more, or say anything more about it. He'll come and plead his own cause. If you'd treated me differently, I might have stopped him. As it is, he must come now."

"Why do you assume I don't want him to come?"

"I assume nothing. I don't know whether you'll make him happy or treat him as you've treated me."

"I sha'n't treat him as I've treated you, Eugene; is he—is he very unhappy about it?"

"Yes, poor devil!" said Eugene bitterly. "He's ready to give up this world and the next for you."

"You think that strange?"

Eugene shook his head with a smile.

> A man had given all other bliss
> And all his worldly worth,

he quoted. "Stafford would give more than that. Good-morning, Lady Claudia."

"Good-bye," she said. "When is he coming?"

"To-day, I expect."

"Thank you."

"Claudia, if you take him, you'll let me know?"

"Yes, yes."

She seemed so absent and troubled that he left her without more, and made his way to his horse and down the drive, without giving a thought to the contingent lunch.

"She'll marry me if she doesn't marry him," he thought. "But, I say, I did make rather an ass of myself!" And he laughed gently and ruefully over Claudia's wrath and his own method of wooing. He would have laughed much the same gentle and rueful laugh over his own hanging, had such an unreasonable accident befallen him.

So far as the main subject of the interview was concerned, Claudia was well pleased with herself. Her indignation had responded very satisfactorily to her call upon it and had enabled her to work off on Eugene her resentment, not only for his own sins, but also for annoyances for which he could not fairly be held responsible. A patient lover must be a most valuable safety-valve. And although Eugene was not the most patient of his kind, Claudia did not think that she had put more upon him than he was able to bear—certainly not more than he deserved to bear. She would have dearly loved the luxury of refusing him, and although she had not been able to make up her mind to this extreme measure, she had, at least, succeeded in infusing a spice of difficulty into his wooing. She was so content with the aspect of affairs in this direction that it did not long detain her thoughts, and she found herself pondering more on the disclosure Eugene had made of Stafford's

feelings than on his revelation of his own. It is difficult, without the aid of subtle distinctions, to say exactly what degree of surprise she felt at the news. She must, no doubt, have seen that Stafford was greatly attracted to her, and probably she would have felt that the description of his state of mind as that of a man in love only erred to the extent that a general description must err when applied to a particular case. But she was both surprised and disturbed at hearing that Stafford intended to act upon his feelings, and the very fact of her power having overcome him did him evil service in her thoughts. The secret of his charm for her lay exactly in the attitude of renunciation that he was now abandoning. She had been half inclined to fall in love with him just because there was no question of his falling in love with her. Her feelings toward Eugene, which lay deeper than she confessed, had prevented her actually losing her heart, or doing more than contemplate the picture of her romantic passion, banned by all manner of awful sanctions, as a not uninteresting possibility. By abandoning his position Stafford abandoned one great source of strength. On the other hand, he no doubt gained something. Claudia was not insensible to that aspect of the case which Ayre had apprehended would influence her so powerfully. She did perceive the halo of romance; and the idea of an Ajax defying heavenly lightning for her sake had its attractiveness. But Ayre reasoning, as a man is prone and perhaps obliged to do, from himself to another, had omitted to take account of a factor in Claudia's mind about the existence of which, even if it had been suggested to him, he

would have been profoundly sceptical. Ayre had never been able, or at least never given himself the trouble, to understand how real a thing Stafford's vow had been to him, and what a struggle was necessary before he could disregard it. He would have been still more at a loss to appreciate the force which the same vow exercised over Claudia. Stafford himself had strengthened this feeling in her. Although the subject of celibacy, and celibacy by oath, had not been discussed openly between them, yet in their numerous conversations Stafford had not failed to respond to her sympathetic invitations so far as to give himself full liberty in descanting on the excellences of the life he had chosen for himself. Every word he had spoken in its praise now rose to condemn its betrayal. And Claudia, who had been brought up in entire removal from the spirit which made Ayre and Eugene treat Stafford's vow as one of the picturesque indiscretions of devotion, was unable to look upon the breaking of it in any other light than that of a falsehood and an act of treachery. Religion was to her a series of definite commands, and although her temperament was not such as enabled or led her to penetrate beneath the commands to the reason of them, or emboldened her to rely on the latter rather than the former, she had never wavered in the view that at least these commands may and should be observed, and that, above all, by a man whose profession it was to inculcate them. This much of genuine disapproval of Stafford's conduct she undoubtedly felt; and there it would be pleasant to leave the matter. But in the commanding interest of truth it must be added that this genuine disapproval was, unconsciously perhaps to her-

self, strengthened by more mundane feelings, which would, if analysed, have been resolved into a sense of resentment against Stafford. He had come to her, as it were, under false pretenses. Relying on his peculiar position, she had allowed herself, without scruple, a freedom and expansion in her relations toward him that she would have condemned, though perhaps not abstained from, had he stood exactly where other men stood; and she felt that, if charged with encouraging him and fostering a delusion in his mind, her defence, though in reality a good one, was not one which the world would accept as justifying her. She could not openly plead that she had flirted with him, because she had never thought he would flirt with her; or allowed him to believe she entertained a deeper regard for him than she did because he could be supposed to feel none for her. Yet that was the truth; and perhaps it was a good defence. And Claudia was resentful because she could not defend herself by using it, and her resentment settled upon the ultimate cause of her perplexities.

When Eugene got back to Territon Park he was received by the brothers with unaffected interest. They were passing the morning in an exhaustive medical inspection of the dogs, but they left even this engrossing occupation, and sauntered out to meet him.

"Well, what luck?" asked Rickmansworth.

"The debate is adjourned," answered Eugene.

"Did Clau make herself agreeable?"

"Well, no; in fact, she made herself as disagreeable as she knew how."

"Raised Cain, did she?" inquired Bob, sympathetically.

"Something of the sort; but I think it's all right."

"You play up, old man," said Bob.

"Well, but what the devil are we to do with this parson?" Lord Rickmansworth demanded. "He'll be here after lunch, you know. You are an ass, Eugene, to bring him down!"

"I'm not quite sure, you know, that he won't persuade her."

"Why didn't you settle it this morning?"

"My dear fellow, she was impossible this morning."

"Oh, bosh!" said his lordship. "Now I'll tell you what you ought to have done——"

"Oh, shut up, Rick! What do you know about it? Stafford must try his luck, if he likes. Don't you fellows bother about him. I'll see him when he comes down."

"Would it be infernally uncivil if we happened to be out in the tandem?" suggested Rickmansworth.

"I expect he'd be rather glad."

"Then we will be out in the tandem. If you kill him, or the other way, just do it outside, will you, so as not to make a mess? Now we'll lunch, and then, Bob, my boy, we'll evaporate."

It was about three o'clock when Stafford arrived. He had managed to catch the 1.30 from London, and must have started the moment he had read his letter. He was shown into the billiard-room, where Eugene was restlessly smoking a cigar.

He came swiftly up, and held out his hand, saying:

"This is like you, my dear old fellow. Not another man in England would have done it."

"Nonsense!" replied Eugene. "I ought to have done more."

"More? How?"

"I ought to have waited till you came before I went to see her."

"No, no; that would have been too much."

He was quite calm and cool; apparently there was nothing on his mind, and he spoke of Eugene's visit as if it concerned him little.

"I daresay you're surprised at all this," he continued, "but I can't talk about that now. It would upset me again. Besides, there's no time."

"Why no time?"

"I must go straight over and see her."

"My dear Charley, are you set on going?"

"Of course. I came for that purpose. You know how sorry I am we are rivals; but I agree with what you said—we needn't be enemies."

"It wasn't that I meant. But you don't ask how I fared."

"Well, I was expecting you would tell me, if there was anything to tell."

"I went, you know, to ask her to be my wife."

Stafford nodded.

"Well, did you?"

"No, not exactly."

"I thought not."

"I tried to—I mean I wasn't kept back by loyalty to you—you mustn't think that. But she wouldn't let me."

"I thought she wouldn't."

Eugene began to understand his state of mind. In another man such confidence would have made him angry; but he had only pity for Stafford.

"I must try and make him understand," he thought.

"Charley," he began, "I don't think you quite follow, and it's not very easy to explain. She didn't refuse me."

"Well, no, if you didn't ask," said Stafford, with a slight smile.

"And she didn't stop me in—in that way. Look here, old fellow; it's no use beating about the bush. I believe she means to have me."

Stafford said nothing.

"But I don't say that to put you off going, because I'm not sure. But I believe she does. And you ought to know what I think. I tell you all I know."

"Do you tell me not to go?"

"I can't do that. I only tell you what I believe."

"She said nothing of the sort?"

"No—nothing explicit."

"Merely declined to listen?"

"Yes—but in a way."

"My dear Eugene, aren't you deceiving yourself?"

"I think not. I think, you know, you're deceiving yourself."

They looked at one another, and suddenly both men smiled.

"I want to spare you," said Eugene; "but it sounds a little absurd."

"The sooner I go the better," said Stafford. "I must tell you, old fellow, I go in confident hope. If I am wrong——"

"Yes?"

"Everything is over! Would you feel that?"

Eugene was always honest with Stafford. He searched his heart.

"I should be cut up," he said. "But no—not that."

Stafford smiled sadly.

"How I wish I could do things by halves!" he exclaimed.

"You will come back?"

"I'll leave a line for you as I go by. Whatever happens, you have treated me well."

"Good-bye, old man. I can't say good luck. When shall I see you?"

"That depends," said Stafford.

Eugene showed him the road to the Dower House, and he set out at a brisk walk.

CHAPTER XIII

A LOVER'S FATE AND A FRIEND'S COUNSEL

It was about half-past three when Stafford left Territon Park; about the same hour Claudia sallied forth from the Dower House to take her constitutional. When two people start to walk at the same time from opposite ends of the same road, barring accidents, they meet somewhere about the middle. In accordance with this law, when Claudia was about two miles from home, walking along the path through the dense woods of Territon Park, she saw Stafford coming toward her. There were no means of escape, and with a sigh of resignation she sat down on a rustic seat and awaited his approach. He saw her as soon as she saw him, and came up to her without any embarrassment.

"I am lucky," he said, "I was going over to see you."

Claudia had given some thought to this interview and had determined on her best course.

"Mr. Lane told me you were coming."

"Dear old Eugene!"

"But I hoped you would not."

"Don't let us begin at the end. I haven't seen you since I left Millstead. Were you surprised at my going?"

"I was rather surprised at the way you went."

"I thought you would understand it. Now, honestly, didn't you?"

"Perhaps I did."

"I thought so. You had seen what I only saw that very night. You understood——"

"Please, Father Stafford——"

"Say Mr. Stafford."

"No. I know you as Father Stafford, and I like that best."

"As you will—for the present. You knew how I stood. You saw I loved you—no, I am going on—and yet felt myself bound not to tell you."

"I saw nothing of the kind. It never entered my head."

"Claudia, is it possible? Did you never think of it?"

"As nothing more than a possibility—and a very unhappy possibility."

"Why unhappy?" he asked, and his voice was very tender.

"To begin with: you could never love any one."

"I have swept all that on one side. That is over."

"How can it be over? You had sworn."

"Yes; but it is over."

"Dare you break your vow?"

"If I dare, who else dare question me? Have I not counted the cost?"

"Nothing can make it right."

"Why talk of that? It is my sin and my concern."

"You destroy all my esteem for you."

"I ask for love, not for esteem. Esteem between you and me! I love you more than all the world."

"Ah! don't say that!"

"Yes, more than my soul. And you talk of esteem! Ah! you don't know what a man's love is."

"I never thought of you as making love."

"I think now of nothing else. Why should I trouble you with my struggles? Now I am free to love—and you, Claudia, are free to return my love."

"Did you think I was in love with you?"

"Yes," said Stafford. "But you knew my promise, and did not let yourself see your own feelings. Ah, Claudia! if it is only the promise!"

"It isn't only the promise. You have no right to speak like that. I should never have done as I did if I'd even thought of you like that."

"What do you mean by saying it's not only the promise?"

"Why, that I don't love you—I never did—oh, what a wretched thing!" And she rose and paced about, clasping her hands.

Stafford was very pale now, but very quiet.

"You never loved me?"

"No."

"But you will. You must, when you know my love——"

"No."

"Yes, but you will. Let me tell you what you are——"

"No, I never can."

"Is it true? Why?"

"Because—oh! don't you see?"

"No. Wasn't it because you loved me that you wouldn't let Eugene speak?"

"No, no, no!"

"Claudia," he cried, clasping her wrist, "were you playing with him?"

No answer seemed possible but the truth.

"Yes," she said, bowing her head.

"And playing with me?"

"No, that's unjust. I never did. I thought——"

"You thought I was beyond hurt?"

"I suppose so. You set up to be."

"Yes, I set up to be," he said bitterly. "And the truth—in God's name let us have truth—is that you love him?"

"Have you no pity? Why do you press me?"

"I will not press you; God forbid I should trouble you! But is this the end?"

"Yes."

"Is it final—no hope? Think what it means to me."

"If I do care for Mr. Lane, is this friendly to him?"

"I am beyond friendship, as I am beyond conscience. Claudia, turn to me. No man ever loved as I do."

"I can't help it," she said; "I can't help it!"

Stafford sank down on the seat and sat there for a moment without speaking. Claudia was awed at the look on his face.

"Don't look like that!" she cried. "You look like a man lost."

"Yes, lost!" he echoed. "All lost—all lost—and for nothing!"

Silence followed for a long time. Then he roused himself, and looked at her. Claudia's eyes were full of tears.

"It's not your fault, my sweet lady," he said gently. "You are pure and bright and beautiful, as you ever were, and I have raved and frightened you. Well, I will go."

"Go where?"

"Where? I don't know yet."

"I am so very, very sorry. But you must try —you must forget about it."

He smiled.

"Yes, I must forget about it."

"You will be yourself again—your old self—not weak like this, but giving others strength."

"Yes," he said again, humouring her.

"Surely you can do it—you who had such strength. And don't think hardly of me."

"I think of you as I used to think of God," he said; and bent and kissed her hand.

"Oh, hush!" she cried. "Pray don't!"

He kissed her hand once again, and then straightened himself, and said:

"Now I am going. You must forget—or remember Millstead, not Territon. And I——"

"Yes, and you?"

"I will go, too, where I may find forgetfulness. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Claudia, and gave him her hand again, her heart full of pity and almost of love. He turned on his heel, and she stood and watched him go. For a moment a sudden thought flashed through her head.

"Shall I call him back? Shall I ever find such love as his?"

She started a step forward, but stopped again.

"No, I do not love him," she said. "And I do love my careless Eugene. But God comfort him! O God, comfort him!"

And so standing and praying for him, she let him go.

And he went, with no falter in his step and never a look backward. This thing also had he set behind him.

Claudia still stood fixed on the spot where he had left her. Then she sat down on the seat, and gave herself up to memories of their walks and talks at Millstead.

"Why need he spoil it all?" she cried. "Why need he give me a sad memory, when I had such a pleasant one? Oh, how foolish they are! What a pity it's Eugene, and not him! Eugene would never have looked like that. He'd have made a bitter little speech, and then a pretty little speech, and smoothed his feathers and flown away. But still it is Eugene! Oh, dear, I shall never be quite happy again!"

We may reasonably, nay confidently, hope that this was looking at the black side of things. It is pleasant to act a little to ourselves now and then. The little pieces are thrilling, and they don't last much longer than their counterparts upon the stage. With most of us the curtain falls very punctually, leaving time for a merry supper, where we forget the headache and the thousand natural and unnatural ills that passed in our sight before the green baize let fall its merciful veil.

Stafford pursued his way through the woods. Arriving at the lodge gates, he stopped abruptly, remembering his promise to Eugene. He saw a little fellow playing about, and called to him.

"Do you know Mr. Lane, my boy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the child.

"Then I'll give you something to take to him."

He took a card out of his pocket and wrote on it: "You were right. I am going to London"; and giving it, with a sixpence, to his messenger, resumed his journey to the station.

He was stunned. It cannot be denied that he

had been blindly hopeful, blindly confident. He had persuaded himself that his love for Claudia could be nothing but the outcome of a natural bond between them that must produce a like feeling in her. He had attributed to her the depth and intensity of emotion that he found in himself. He had seen in her not merely a girl of more than common quickness, and perhaps more than common capacity, but a great nature ready to respond to a great passion in another. She had much to give to the man she loved; but Stafford asked even more than was hers to bestow. He had deceived himself, and the delusion was still upon him. He was conscious only of an utter, hopeless void. He had removed all to make room for Claudia, and Claudia refused to fill the vacant place. With all the will in the world she could not have filled it; but no such thought as this came to console Stafford. He saw his joy, but was forbidden to reach out his hand and pluck it. His life lay in the hollow of her hand, to grant or withhold, and she had closed her grasp upon it.

He did not rest until he reached his hotel, for he felt a longing to be able to sit down quietly and think it all over. He fancied that when he reached his own little room, the cloud that now seemed to hang over all his faculties would disperse, and he would see some plain road before him. In this he was not altogether disappointed, for it did become clear to him, as he sat in his chair, that the question he had to solve was whether he could now find any motive strong enough to keep him in life. He realised that Claudia's action must be accepted as a final destruction of his short dream of happiness. He felt that he could not go back to his old life,

much less to his old attitude of mind, as if nothing had happened—as if he were an unchanged man, save for one sorrowful memory. The transformation had been too thorough for that. He had almost hoped that he would find himself the subject of some sudden revulsion of feeling, some uncontrollable fit of remorse, which would restore him, beaten and bruised, to his old refuge; but had his hope been realised, his sense of relief would, he knew, have been mingled with a measure of contempt for a mind so completely a prey to transient emotions. His nature was not of that sort, and he could not by a spasm of penitence nullify the events of the last few months. He must accept himself as altered by what he had gone through. Was there, then, any life left for the man he was now?

Undoubtedly, the easiest thing was to bid a quiet good-bye to the life he had so mismanaged. He had never in old days been wedded to life. He had learnt always to regard it rather as a necessary evil than as a thing desirable in itself. Its momentary sweetness left it more bitter still. There would be a physical pang, inevitable to a strong man, full of health. But this he was ready to face; and now, in leaving life, he would leave behind nothing he regretted. The religious condemnation of suicide, which in former days would not have decided, but prevented such a discussion in his mind, now weighed little with him. No doubt it would be an act of cowardice: but he had been guilty of such a much more flagrant treachery and desertion, that the added sin seemed a small matter. He felt that to boggle over it would be like condemning a murderer for trying to cheat the gallows. But still, there was the natural dislike of an acknowledg-

ment of utter defeat; and, added to this, the bitter reluctance a man of ability feels at the idea of his powers ceasing to be active, and himself ceasing to be. The instinct of life was strong in him, though his reason seemed to tell him there was no way in which his life could be used.

"It's better to go!" he exclaimed at last, after long hours of conflicting meditation.

It was getting late in the evening. Eleven o'clock had struck, and he thought he would go to bed. He was very tired and worn out, and decided to put off further questions till the next day.

After all, there was no hurry. He knew the worst now; the blow had been struck, and only the dull, unending pain was with him—and would be till the hour came when he should free himself from it. He resolutely turned his mind away from Claudia. He could not bear to think about her. If only he could manage to think about nothing for an hour, sleep would come.

He rose to take his candle, but at the same moment a waiter opened the door.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"To see me? Who is it?"

"He says his name's Ayre, and he hopes you'll see him."

"I can't see him at this time of night," said Stafford, with the petulance of weariness. Why did the man bother him?

But Ayre had followed close on his messenger, and entered the room as Stafford spoke.

"Pray forgive me, Mr. Stafford," he said, "for intruding on you so unceremoniously."

Stafford received him with courtesy, but did not

succeed in concealing his questioning as to the motive of the visit.

Ayre took the chair his host gave him.

"You think this a very strange proceeding on my part, I dare say?"

"How did you know I was here?"

"I had a wire from Eugene Lane. I'm afraid I seem to be taking a liberty, and that's a thing I hate doing. But I was most anxious to see you."

"Has Eugene any news?"

"What he says is this: 'It has happened as we feared. I am uneasy about him. Can you see him to-night?'"

"I suppose, then, my fortune is known to you?"

"Yes; I wish I had seen you before you went. Do you mind my interfering?"

"No, not now. You could have done no good before."

"I could have told you it was no use."

"I shouldn't have believed you."

"I suppose you were bound to try it for yourself. Now, you think I don't understand your feelings."

"I suppose most people think they know how a man feels when he's crossed in love," said Stafford, trying to speak lightly.

"That's not the only thing with you."

"No, it isn't," he replied, a little surprised.

"I feel rather responsible for it all, you know. I was at the bottom of Morewood's showing you that picture."

"It must have dawned on me sooner or later."

"I don't know. But, yes—I expect so. You're hard hit."

Stafford smiled.

"Hard hit about her; and harder hit because it was a plunge to go into it at all."

"You're quite right."

"Of course I can't go into that side of it very much, but I think I know more or less how you feel."

"I really think you do. It surprises me."

"Yes. But, Stafford, may I go on taking liberties?"

"I believe you are my friend. Let us put that sort of question out of the way. Why have you come?"

"What does he mean by saying he's uneasy about you?"

"It's the old fellow's love for me."

Ayre was silent for a moment. Then he asked abruptly:

"What are you going to do?"

"I have hardly had time to look round yet."

"Why should it make any difference to you?"

Stafford was puzzled. He thought Ayre had really recognised the state of his mind. He was inclined to think so still. But how, then, could he ask such a question?

"You've had your holiday," Ayre went on calmly, "and a precious bad use you've made of it. Why not go back to work now?"

"As if nothing had happened?" This was the very suggestion he had made to himself, and scornfully rejected.

"You think you're utterly smashed, of course—I know what a facer it can be—and you're just the man to take it very hard. Stafford, I'm sorry." And with a sudden impulse he held out his hand.

Stafford grasped it. The sympathy almost

broke him down. "She is all the world to me," he said.

"Aye, but be a man. You have your work to do."

"No, I have no work to do. I threw all that away."

"I expected you'd say that."

"I know, of course, what you think of it. In your view, that vow of mine was nonsense—a part of the high-falutin' way I took everything in. Isn't that so?"

"I didn't come here to try and persuade you to think as I do about such things. I am not so fond of my position that I need proselytise. But I want you to look into yours."

"Mine is only too clear. I have given up everything and got nothing. It's this way: all the heart is out of me. If I went back to my work I should be a sham."

"I don't see that. May I smoke?"

He lighted a cigar, and sat quiet for a few seconds.

"I suppose," he resumed, "you still believe what you used to teach?"

"Certainly; that is—yes, I believe it. But it isn't part of me as it was."

"Ah! but you think it's true?"

"I remain perfectly satisfied with the demonstration of its truth—only I have lost the faith that is above knowledge."

It was evidently only with an effort that Ayre repressed a sarcasm. Stafford saw his difficulty.

"You don't follow that?"

"I have heard it spoken of before. But, after all, it's beside the point. You believe the things

so that, as far as honesty goes, you could still teach them ?"

"Certainly I should believe every dogma I taught."

"Including the dogma that people ought to be good ?"

"Including that," answered Stafford, with a smile.

"I don't see what more you want," said Sir Roderick, with an air of finality.

Stafford felt himself, against his will, growing more cheerful. In fact, it was a pleasure to him to exercise his brains once again, instead of being the slave of his emotions. Ayre had anticipated such a result from their conversation.

"Everything more," he said. "Personal holiness is at the bottom of it all."

"The best thing, I dare say," Ayre conceded. "But indispensable ? Besides, you have it."

"Never again."

"Yes, I say—in all essentials."

"I can't do it. Ah, Ayre ! it's all empty to me now."

"For God's sake, be a man ! Is there nothing on earth to be but a saint or a husband ?"

Stafford looked at him inquiringly.

"Heavens, man ! have you no ambition ? Here you are, with ten men's brains, and you sit—I don't know how you sit—in sackcloth, clearly, but whether for heaven or for Claudia I don't know. You think it odd to hear me preach ambition ? I'm a lazy devil ; but I have some power. Yes, I'm in my way a power. I might have been a greater. You might be a greater than ever I could."

Stafford listened.

"Do good if you can," Ayre went on, "and you

can. But do something. Don't throw up the sponge because you had one fall. Make yourself something to live for."

"In the Church?"

"Yes—that suits you best. Your own Church or another. I've often wondered why you don't try the other."

"I've been very near trying it before now."

"It's a splendid field. Glorious! You might do anything."

Stafford was silent, and Ayre sat regarding him closely.

"Use my office for personal ambition?" he asked at last.

"Pray don't talk cant. Do some good work, and raise yourself high enough to do more."

"I doubt that motive."

"Never mind the motive. Do, man, do! and don't puke. Leave Eugene to lounge through life. He does it nicely. You're made for more."

Stafford looked up at him as he laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's all misery," he said.

"Now, yes. But not always."

"And it's not what I meant."

"No, you meant to be a saint. Many of us do."

"I feel what you mean, but I have scruples."

Ayre looked at him curiously.

"You're not a man of scruples really," he said; "you'll get over them."

"Is that a compliment?"

"Depends on whom you ask. You'll think of it? Think of what you might do and be. Now, I'm off."

Stafford rose to show him out.

"I'm not sure whether I ought to thank you," he said.

"You will think of it?"

"Yes."

"And you won't kill yourself without seeing me again?"

"You were afraid of that?"

"Yes. Was I wrong?"

"No."

"You won't, then, without seeing me again?"

"No; I promise."

Ayre found his way downstairs, and into the street.

"It will work," he said to himself. "If the Humane Society did its duty, I should have a gold medal. I have saved a life to-night—and a life worth saving."

And Stafford, instead of going to bed, sat in his chair again, pondering the new things in his heart.

CHAPTER XIV

SOME PEOPLE ARE AS FORTUNATE AS THEY DESERVE TO BE

EUGENE LANE had been rather puzzled by Claudia's latest proceedings. On the morrow of her interview with Stafford he had received from her an incoherent note, in which she took grave blame to herself for "this unhappy occurrence," and intimated that it would be long before she could bear to discuss any question pending between herself and her correspondent. Eugene was not disposed to acquiesce in this decision. He had done as much as honour and friendship demanded, and saw no reason why his own happiness should be longer delayed; for he had little doubt that Stafford's rebuff meant his own success. He could not, however, persist in seeking Claudia after her declaration of unwillingness to be sought; and he departed from Territon Park in some degree of dudgeon. All this sort of thing seemed to him to have a touch of the theatre about it. But Claudia took it seriously; she did not forbid him to write to her, but she answered none of his letters, and Lord Rickmansworth, whom he encountered at one of the October race-meetings, gave him to understand that she was living a life of seclusion at Territon Park. Rickmansworth openly scoffed at this behaviour, and Eugene did not know whether to be pleased at finding his views agreed with, or angry at hearing his mistress's whims treated with fra-

ternal disrespect. Ultimately, he found himself, under the influence of lunch, coinciding with Rickmansworth's dictum that girls rather liked making fools of themselves, and that Claudia was no better than the rest. It was one of Eugene's misfortunes that he could not cherish illusions about his friends, unless his feeling toward Stafford must be ranked as an illusion. About the latter he had heard nothing, except for a short note from Sir Roderick, telling him that no tragedy of a violent character need now be feared. He was anxious to see Ayre and learn what had passed, but that gentleman had also vanished to recruit at a German bath after his arduous labours.

It was mid-November before any progress was made in the matter. Eugene was in London, and so were very many people, for Parliament met in the autumn that year, and the season before Christmas was more active than usual. He had met Haddington about the House, and congratulated him with a fervour and sincerity that had made the recipient of his blessings positively uneasy. Why should Lane be so uncommonly glad to get rid of Kate? thought the happy man who had won her from him. It really looked as if there were something more than met the eye. Eugene detected this idea in Haddington's mind, and it caused him keen amusement. Kate also he had encountered, and their meeting had been marked by the ceremonious friendship demanded by the circumstances. The flavour of diplomacy imparted to private life by these episodes had not, however, been strong enough to prevent Eugene being very bored. He was growing from day to day less patient of Claudia's invisibility, and he expressed his

feeling very plainly one day to Rickmansworth, whom he happened to encounter in the outer lobby, as the noble lord was finding his way to the unwonted haunt of the House of Lords, thereto attracted by a debate on the proper precautions it behooved the nation to take against pleuro-pneumonia.

"Surprising," he said, "what interesting subjects the old buffers get hold of now and then! Come and hear 'em, old man."

"The Lord forbid!" said Eugene. "But I want to say a word to you, Rick, about Claudia. I can't stand this much longer."

"I wouldn't," said Rickmansworth, "if I were you; but it isn't my fault."

"It's absurd treating me like this because of Stafford's affair."

"Well, why don't you go and call in Grosvenor Square? She's there with Aunt Julia."

"I will. Do you think she'll see me?"

"My dear fellow, I don't know; only if I wanted to see a girl, I bet she'd see me."

Eugene smiled at his friend's indomitable self-confidence, and let him fly to the arms of pleuro-pneumonia. He then dispensed with his own presence in his branch of the Legislature, and took his way toward Grosvenor Square, where Lord Rickmansworth's town house was.

Lady Claudia was not at home. She had gone with her aunt earlier in the day to give Mr. Morewood a sitting. Mr. Morewood was painting her portrait.

"I expect they've stayed to tea. I haven't seen old Morewood for no end of a time. Gad! I'll go to tea."

And he got into a hansom and went, wondering with some amusement how Claudia had persuaded Morewood to paint her. It turned out, however, that the transaction was of a purely commercial character. Rickmansworth, having been very successful at the race-meeting above referred to, had been minded to give his sister a present, and she had chosen her own head on a canvas. The price offered was such that Morewood could not refuse ; but he had in the course of the sitting greatly annoyed Claudia by mentioning incidentally that her face did not interest him and was, in fact, such a face as he would never have painted but for the pressure of penury.

"Why doesn't it interest you?" asked she, in pardonable irritation.

"I don't know. It's—but I dare say it's my fault," he replied, in that tone which clearly implies the opposite of what is asserted.

"It must be, I think," said Claudia gently. "You see, it interests so many people, Mr. Morewood."

"Not artists."

"Dear me! no!

"Whom then?"

"Oh, the nobility and gentry."

"And clergy?"

A shadow passed across her face—but a fleeting shadow.

"You paint very slowly," she said.

"I do when I am not inspired. I hate painting young women."

"Oh! Why?"

"They're not meant to be painted; they're meant to be kissed."

"Does the one exclude the other?"

"That's for you to say," said Morewood, with a grin.

"I think they're meant to be painted by some people, and kissed by other people. Let the cobbler stick to his last, Mr. Morewood."

"I wonder if you'll stick to your last," said Morewood.

Claudia decided that she had better not see this joke, if the contemptible quip could be so called. It was very impertinent, and she had no retort ready. She revenged herself by declaring her sitting at an end, and inviting herself and her aunt to stay to tea.

"I've got no end of work to do," Morewood protested.

"Surely tea is *compris?*" she asked, with raised eyebrows. "We sha'n't stay more than an hour."

Morewood groaned, but ordered tea. After all, it was too dark to paint, and—well, she was amusing.

Eugene arrived almost at the same moment as tea. Morewood was glad to see him, and went as near showing it as he ever did. Lady Julia received him with effusion, Claudia with dignity.

"I have pursued you from Grosvenor Square, Lady Julia," he said. "I didn't come to see old Morewood, you know."

"As much as to see me, I dare say," said Lady Julia in an aside.

Eugene protested with a shake of the head, and Morewood carried him off to have such inspection of the picture as artificial light could afford.

"You've got her very well."

"Yes, pretty well. It's a bright little shallow face."

"Go to the devil!" said Eugene, in strong indignation.

"I only said that to draw you. There is something in the girl—but not overmuch, you know."

"There's all I want."

"Oh, I should think so! Heard anything of Stafford?"

"No, except that he's gone off somewhere alone again. He wrote to Ayre; Ayre told me. He and Ayre are very thick now."

"A queer combination."

"Yes. I wonder what they'll make of one another!"

Morewood was a good-natured man at bottom, and after a few minutes' more talk he carried off Aunt Julia to look at his etchings.

"So I have run you down at last?" said Eugene to Claudia.

"I told you I didn't want to see you."

"I know. But that was a month ago."

"I was very much upset."

"So was I, awfully!"

"Do you think it was my fault, Mr. Lane?"

"Not a bit. So far as it was anybody's fault, it was mine."

"How yours?"

"Well, you see, he thought——"

"Yes, I see. You needn't go on. He thought you were out of the question, and therefore——"

"Now, Lady Claudia, are you going to quarrel again?"

"No, I don't think so. Only you are so annoying. Is he in great trouble?"

"He was. I think he's better now. But it was a terrible blow to him, as it would be to any one."

"To you?"

"It would be death!"

"Nonsense!" said Claudia. "What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. I think he will go back to work."

"I never intended any harm."

"You never do."

"You mean I do it? Pray don't try to be desperate and romantic, Mr. Lane. It's not in your line."

"It's curious I can never get credit for deep feeling. I have spent a miserable month."

"So have I."

"Because I could see not the person I love best in the world."

"Ah! that wasn't my reason."

"Claudia, you must give me an answer."

Claudia rose, and joined her aunt and Morewood. She gave Eugene no further opportunity for private conversation, and soon after the ladies took their leave. As Eugene shook hands with Claudia, he said:

"May I call to-morrow?"

"You are a little unkind; but you may." And she rapidly passed on to Morewood, and with much sparring made an appointment for her next sitting.

"Why does she fence so with me?" he asked the painter, as he took his hat.

"What's the harm? You know you enjoy it."

"I don't."

But it is very possible he did.

The next day Eugene took advantage of Claudia's permission. He went to Grosvenor Square, and asked boldly for Lady Claudia. He was

shown into the drawing-room. After a time Claudia came to him.

"I have come for my answer," he said, taking her hand.

Claudia was looking grave.

"You know the answer," she said. "It must be 'Yes.'"

Eugene drew her to him and kissed her.

"But you say 'Yes' as if it gave you pain."

"So it does, in a way."

"You don't like being conquered even by your own prisoner?"

"It's not that; that is, I think, rather a namby-pamby feeling. At any rate, I don't feel it."

"What is it, then? You don't care enough for me?"

"Ah, I care too much!" she cried. "Eugene, I wish I could have loved Father Stafford, and not you."

"Why so?"

"I was at the very centre of his life. I don't think I am more than on the fringe of yours."

"A very priceless fringe to a very worthless fabric!" said he, kissing her hand.

"Yes," she answered, with a smile, "you are perfect in that. You might give lessons in amatory deportment."

"Out of a full heart the mouth speaketh."

"Ah! does it? May not a lover be too *point-device* in his speeches as well as in his accoutrements? Father Stafford came to me pale, yes, trembling, and with rugged words."

"I am not the man that Stafford is—save for my lady's favour."

"And you came in confidence?"

"You had let me hope."

"You have known it for a long while. I don't trust you, you know, but I must. Will you treat me as you treated Kate?"

"Slander!" cried he gayly. "I didn't 'treat' Kate. Kate 'treated' me."

"Poor fellow!"

He had sat down in a low chair close to hers, and she bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

"At least, I don't think you'll like any one better than you like me, and I must be content with that."

"I have worshipped you for years. Was ever beauty so exacting?"

"With lucid intervals?"

"Never a moment. A sense of duty once led me astray—dynastic considerations—a suitable cousin."

"Yes; and I suppose a moonlight night."

"*Pereant quae ante te!* You know a little Latin?"

"I think I'd better not just now."

"You may want it for yourself, you know, with a change of gender. But we'll not bandy recriminations."

"I wasn't joking."

"Not when you began; but with me all your troubles shall end in jokes, and every tear in a smile. Claudia, I never knew you so alarmingly serious before."

"Well, I won't be serious any more. The fatal deed is done!"

"And I may say 'Claudia' now without fear of any one?"

"You will be able to say it for about the next fifty years. I hope you won't get tired of it. Eugene, try to get tired of me last of all."

"Never while I live! You are a perpetual refreshment."

"A lofty function!"

"And the spring of all my life. Let us be happy, dear, and never mind fifty years hence."

"I will," she said; "and I am happy."

"And, please God, you shall always be so. One would think it was a very dangerous thing to marry me!"

"I will brave the danger."

"There is none. I have found my goddess."

The door opened suddenly, and Bob Territon entered at the very moment when Eugene was sealing his vow of homage. Bob was pleased to be playful. Holding his hands before his face, he turned and pretended to fly.

"Come in, old man," cried Eugene, "and congratulate me!"

"Oh! you have fixed it, have you?"

"We have. Don't you think we shall do very well together?"

Bob stood regarding them, his hands in his pockets.

"Yes," he said at length, "I think you will. There's a pair of you."

And he could never be persuaded to explain this utterance. But it is to be feared that the thought underlying it was one not over-complimentary to the happy lovers. And Bob knew them both very well.

CHAPTER XV

AN END AND A BEGINNING

When Sir Roderick Ayre returned to England, he had to undergo much questioning concerning his dealings with Stafford. It had somehow become known throughout the little group of people interested in Stafford's abortive love-affair that he and Ayre had held conference together, and the impression was that Ayre's counsel had, to some extent at least, shaped Stafford's resolution and conduct. Ayre did not talk freely on the matter. He fenced with the idle inquiries of the Territon brothers; he calmed Mrs. Lane's solicitude with soothing words; he put Morewood off with a sneer at the transitoriness of love-affairs in general. To Eugene he spoke more openly, and did not hesitate to congratulate himself on the part he had taken in reconciling Stafford to life and work. Eugene cordially agreed with his point of view; and Ayre felt that he was in a fair way to be rid of the matter, when one day Claudia sprang upon him with a new assault.

He had come to see her, and tender hearty congratulations. He felt that the successful issue of Eugene's suit was in some degree his own work, and he was well pleased that his two favourites should have taken to one another. Moreover, he reaped intellectual satisfaction from the fulfilment of a prophecy made when its prospects of realisation seemed very scant. Claudia admitted her own

pleasure in her engagement, and did not attempt to deny that her affection had dated from a period when by all the canons of propriety she should have had no thoughts of Eugene.

"We are not responsible for our emotions," she said, laughing; "and you will admit I behaved with the utmost decorum."

"About your usual decorum," he replied. "The situation was difficult."

"It was indeed," she sighed. "Eugene was so very—well, reckless. But I want to ask you something."

"Say on."

"I heard about your interview with Father Stafford; what did you say to him?"

"Of course Eugene has told you all I told him?"

"Probably. I told him to."

"Well, that's all."

"In fact, you told him I wasn't worth fretting about!"

"Not in that personal way. I asserted a general principle, and reluctantly denied that you were an exception."

"I hope you did tell him I wasn't worth it, and very plainly. But hasn't he gone back to his religious work?"

"I think he will."

"Did you advise him to do that?"

"Yes, certainly. It's what he's most fit for, and I told him so."

"He spoke to me as if—as if he had no religion left."

"Yes, it took him in that way. He'll get over that."

"I think you were wrong to tell him to go back. Didn't you encourage him to go back to the work without feeling the religion?"

"Perhaps I did. Did Eugene tell you that?"

"Yes."

"I'll never say anything to a lover again."

"Didn't you tell him to use his work for personal ends—for ambition, and so on?"

"Oh, in a way. I had to stir him up—I had to tide him over a bad hour."

"That was very wrong. It was teaching him to degrade himself."

"He can pursue his work in perfect sincerity. I found that out."

"Can he if he does it with a low motive?"

"My dear girl, whose motives are not mixed? Whose heart is single?"

"His was once!"

"Before he met—you and me? I made the best job I could. I cemented the breakage; I couldn't undo it."

"I would rather——"

"He'd picturesquely drown himself?"

"Oh, no," she said, with a shudder; "but it lowers my ideal of him."

"That, considering your position, is not wholly a bad thing."

"Do you think he's justified in doing it?"

"To tell the truth, I don't see quite to the bottom of him. But he will do great things——"

"Now he is well quit of me?"

Sir Roderick smiled.

"Well, I don't like it."

"Then you should have married him, and left Eugene to do the drowning."

"Do you know, Sir Roderick, I rather doubt if Eugene would have drowned himself?"

"I don't know; he has very good manners."

They both laughed.

"But all the same, I am unhappy about Mr. Stafford."

"Ah, your notions of other people's morality are too exalted. I don't accept responsibility for Stafford. He would not have followed my suggestion unless the idea had been in germ in his own mind."

Claudia's preoccupation with Stafford's fate would have been somewhat disturbing to a lover less philosophical or less sympathetic than Eugene. As it was, he was pleased with her concern, and his sorrow for the trouble it occasioned her was mitigated by a conviction that its effect would not be permanent. In this idea he proved perfectly correct. As the weeks passed by and nothing was heard of the vanished man, his place in the lives of those who had been so intimately associated with him became filled with other interests, and from a living presence he dwindled to an occasional memory. It was as if he had really died. His name was now and then mentioned with the sad affection we accord to those who have gone before us; for the most part the thought of him was thrust out in the busy give-and-take of everyday life. Save for the absence of that bitter sense of hopelessness which the separation of death brings, Stafford might as well have passed on the road which, but for Ayre's intervention, he had marked out for himself. Claudia and Eugene were wrapped up in one another; their love for him, though not dead, was dormant, and his name was oftener upon the lips of Ayre and Morewood than of those who

had been most closely united with him in the bonds of common experience. But Ayre and Morewood, besides entertaining a kindly memory of his personal charm, found delight in studying him as a problem. They were keenly interested in the upshot of his new start in life, and their blunter perceptions were deaf to the dissonance between the ideal he had set before himself and the alternative Ayre had suggested for his adoption. Perhaps they were right. If none but saints may do the work of the world, much of its most useful work must go undone.

Haddington and Kate Bernard were married before Christmas. Claudia deprecated such haste; and Eugene willingly acquiesced in her wish to put off the date of their own union. He thought that being engaged to Claudia was a pleasant state of existence, and why hasten to change it? Besides, as he suggested, they were not people of fickle mind, like Kate and Haddington (for, of course, Claudia had told him of Haddington's proposal to herself—it is believed ladies always do tell these incidents), and could afford to wait. Eugene went to the wedding. He was strongly opposed to such foolish things as standing quarrels, and Kate was entirely charming in the capacity of somebody else's wife: it is a comparatively easy part to fill, and he had no fault to find with her conception of it. The magnificence of his wedding present smoothed his return to favour, and Kate had the good sense to accept the *rôle* he offered her, and allowed it to be supposed that she had been the faithless, he the forsaken, one; whereas in reality, as Ayre remarked, she had herself doubled the parts. Claudia judiciously avoided the question of her presence at the

ceremony by a timely absence from London, and enjoyed only at second-hand the amusement Eugene derived from Haddington's hesitation between triumph over his supposed rival, and doubt, which had in reality gained the better part. In spite of this doubt, it is allowable to hope for a very fair share of working happiness in the Haddington household. Kate was hardly a woman to make a man happy; but, on the other hand, she would not prevent him being happy if his bent lay in that direction. And Haddington was too entirely contented with himself to be other than happy.

Eugene's wedding was fixed for the Easter recess, and among the party gathered for the occasion at Millstead were most of those who had been his guests in the previous summer. The Haddingtons were not there—Kate retorted Claudia's evasion; and of course Stafford's figure was missing; but the Territon brothers were there, and Morewood and Ayre, the former bringing with him the completed picture, which was Rickmansworth's present to his sister. The party was to be enlarged the day before the wedding by a large company of relations of both their houses.

The evening before this invasion was expected, Eugene came down to dinner looking rather perturbed. He was a little silent during the meal, and when the ladies withdrew, he turned at once to Ayre:

"I have heard from Stafford."

"Ah! what does he say?"

"He has joined the Church of Rome."

"I thought he would."

Morewood grunted angrily.

"Did you tell him to?" he asked Ayre.

"No; I think I referred to it."

"Do you suppose he's honest?" Morewood went on.

"Why not?" asked Eugene. "I could never make out why he didn't go before. What do you say, Ayre?"

Sir Roderick was a little troubled. This exact following of, or anyhow coincidence with, his advice seemed to cast a responsibility upon him.

"Oh, I expect he's honest enough; and it's a splendid field for him," he answered, repeating the argument he had urged to Stafford himself.

"Ayre," said Morewood aggressively, "you've driven that young man to perdition."

"Bosh!" said Ayre. "He's not a sheep to be driven, and Rome isn't perdition. I did no more than give his thoughts a turn."

"I think I am glad," said Eugene; "it is much better in some ways. But he must have gone through another struggle, poor fellow!"

"I doubt it," said Ayre.

"Anyhow, it's rather a score for those chaps," remarked Rickmansworth. "He's a good fish to land."

"Yes, it will make a bit of a sensation," assented Ayre. "We'll see what the Bishop says when he comes to turn Eugene off. By the way, is it public property?"

"It will be in the papers, I expect, to-morrow. I wonder what they'll say!"

"Everything but the truth."

"By Jove, I hope so. And we alone know the secret history!"

"Yes," said Ayre; "and you, Rick, will have to sit silent and hear the enemy triumph."

Lord Rickmansworth did not think it worth while to repudiate the *odium theologicum* imputed to him. Probably he knew he was in reality above the suspicion of caring for such things.

"Shall you tell Claudia?" Ayre asked Eugene, as they went upstairs.

"Yes; I shall show her his letter. I think I ought, don't you?"

"Perhaps; will you show it me?"

"Yes; in fact he asks me to give you the news, as he is too occupied to write to you. The note is quite short, and, I think, studiously reserved."

He gave it to Ayre, who read it silently. It ran:

DEAR EUGENE:

A line to wish Lady Claudia and yourself all happiness and joy. Do not let your joy be shadowed by over kind thoughts of me. I am my own man again. You will see soon by the papers that I have taken the important step of being received into the Catholic Church. I need not trouble you with an argument. I think I have done well, and hope to find there work for my hands to do. Pray give this news to Ayre, and with it my most warm and friendly remembrances. I would write but for my stress of work. He was a friend to me in my need. They are sending me to Rome for a time; after that I hope I shall come to England, and renew my friendships. Good-bye, old fellow, till then. I long for *σῆτ' ἀγανοφροσύῃ καὶ σοὶς ἀγανῖς ἐπέεσσιν.*

Yours always,

C. S.

"That doesn't tell one much, does it?"

"No," said Ayre; "but we shall learn more if we watch him."

Claudia came up, and they gave her the note to read.

She read it, asking to have the Greek translated to her. Then she said to Ayre:

"What does it mean?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because you are most likely to know."

"Mind, I may be wrong; I may do him injustice, but I think——"

"Yes?" she said impatiently.

"I think, Lady Claudia, you have spoilt a Saint and made a Cardinal!"

THE END

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